

COLLECTED POEMS

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THE POEMS OF T. STURGE MOORE

COLLECTED EDITION
THIRD VOLUME



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NOTE

This volume like the first and second is planned as an organic sequence, but also forms the focus in relation to which the others should appear subordinate when the series is complete.

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EPISTLES

EPISTLE I
IN MEMORY OF
LILIAS FISHER

TO A MAN UNNAMED (about B.C. 100)

I WRITE to thee, O wanderer from my heart,
I And know not when or whether this stick wound
With parchment find thee; if indeed thou art
Not where yet flimsier stuff than flesh hangs round
A soul that travels kingdoms underground
And sighs to less effect than I do here.
Out of earshot, beyond the blue day's bound,
Near those whose life is more than our own dear
Wherever they may go, walk danger, death, and fear.

A false smile lights the beauty of this bay:
Our temple on the headland has been robbed:
A pirate stole the goddess yesterday:
Our hearts still ache to have so wildly throbbed,
Yet still her pine grove has not stirred or sobbed.
Slow-oared he toiled off, heavy with his freight,
Opposed by no black surges. Dolphins bobbed
Through calm serene: an unconcern so great
Mocked us, who trod on nettles, forced to watch and wait.

Some said, "The surface ruffles two mile out,
Once there his pinnace may hoist sail and shape
What course she will." But then hope veered about;
A trireme thrashed full speed around the cape:
The robber even despaired of his escape.
She by moonlight the night before had come
Up from the west... timber and stone ascrape
Had poled to mole-side berth amid a hum
Roused from the slumber of Myrina white and dumb.

Bion, who loves to find the moorcock's nest
And often wanders inland with his dogs,
Had hailed our Olpis somewhere on the crest,
Climbing sheep-walks to fire the beacon logs :
So down the ridge's farther flank he jogs
And brings our news hot to the captain's ear.
A drum with slaves and soldiers quickly clogs
The gangways to the trireme : soon she steers
Anew to sea, rounds the great headland and appears

Resplendent as a timely god to us.
Then lo ! this latest strongest hope is slain !
How loth we are to admit the world is thus !
True, thou hadst taught me over and over again
That, like these pirates, men have eyes in vain !
That the rich Roman pays was all they knew,
Will frustrate Rome's laws may he thereby gain
Somewhat to feed his pomp or lewdness ; true
When beauty no more leads, virtue deserts us too.

Long before noon our dazzled eyes grew stiff
Glued on the robber rigging tackle and, while
He lowered the goddess dangling down the cliff,
Hardly could glance whether Olpis fired that pile.
At last, the trireme clears the point, we smile
Convinced they will be captured. Horror ! No !
They lift the goddess .. yes ! recklessly vile,
Lower her over the stern, stone-like to go
Where she, no gain to them, plunged us in deeper woe.

Befriended by the breeze they spread sail, left
As moorcock leaves a dog, the trireme staring,
Keen, strong, and fleet in vain ! Vain too their theft;
Yet they light-hearted down the wind were faring,
The world before them and as little caring
As thou, for those who cannot follow.. life
Mocking law, now mocking once, fact daring
Prediction to refuse belief...

Three weeks have worn out since I broke this off,
For distant lands seemed deaf when I began
And my voice fluttered seawards like a moth;
In vain I through a list of cities ran :
They were but names, thou wast a living man
Crowded from view, as out there under water
Our goddess lies, though yet I never can
Decide the spot whence we peered down when brought there
By the small boat in which we hour on hour had sought her.

To search the bay had grown my daily need.
When found, she shimmered tremulously white
So small on dim rocks soft with feathery weed !
Shoals of fish passed between us dun or bright
With silver-winking sides. The baffled sight,
Although we knew she smiled, could not receive
Her greeting. "Lies not her lifted right
Arm strangely?" Olpis set the boat a-heave
And with wild swirl and gush did that deep dreamland
cleave.

He kneels beside her. Yes, he shifts it; yes
Her arm is broken! Do not mock at me;
I lay, benightmared, thine, all tenderness,
Only last night weighed down as by a sea.
Though thou couldst touch me I could not touch thee.
Thy lips could murmur, mine seemed carved in stone;
Thine eager gaze lost fire so mournfully
Mine could not even tell thee thou wast known
Till ghost-like thou must fade and leave my trance alone.

Ah! so thou, unseen, fadest day by day:
The bliss once ours yawns like that rifled shrine:
Soon thou wilt live less than dead poets may
Winging our souls with buoyancy divine;
Yet all their power over me is thine
Who taught me, though thy junior and a girl,
To ponder verse until its pulse grew mine,
Watch imagery like some rose-bud unfurl
And haunt deep places till I could bring back a pearl.

Too many fathoms down she lies, and thou
Hast been too long afar for me to haul
That altered and reluctant face which now
Smiles on new friends, back to the fragile small
Bark of my life. How prize this beach, with all
That sea of distance rich with gems more rare
Than my lorn heart? Could the horizon's wall
Be pierced, as I might drowning sink to her,
Death would seem kind as sleep, so I lay near thee there!

Although these eyes shrink not from my salt tears,
Yet nothing will induce their lids to part
Under sea water ..locked with iron fears
Though they can flutter like my ailing heart,
When the white-bellied swallows round me dart
As I bask on the cliff. Olpis would teach
Me how to dive ..began ..but from the start
Our efforts were proved vain, for if I reach
Those depths quite blind, as well remain upon the beach.

Which I still idly crunch apace with Grief
Who looks so handsome yet has nought to give..
No rare thought, no caress, but like a thief
Still robs sweet Long-ago that he may live
And dons importance Rapture was cloaked with ;
Yet, as though I by him might hope to breed
Or found his stale reports restorative,
I cling and follow. Ah ! he knows my need,
And mimics thy dear voice on which I starve and feed.

Across my thought it comes like a young wind
How thou gazest ahead, I on the past:
The tree whose boughs the autumn storms have thinned
Yearns for next summer's leaves and not for last.
—O Lady of Dreams; hither with raised hand cast*
Seed of sound slumber: on thy bended arm
Drowse two babe-visions; one with lips glued fast
Drinks beauty; to be dropped and nestle warm
In human cot the other waits, full-charged with charm.

*This passage is evidently addressed to the foundered statue, but describes no remaining work of antique sculpture.

I long to breathe that magic spore of sleep
So needful for the worn and weary brain.
Send infant plumpie arms and knees to creep
Home to my heart's deep cradle once again
Where nightmares toil with an old obdurate pain.
Since couched on dainty sea-fern thou liest wrecked
Must prayer for thy compassion plead in vain?
To heal and lift is thine, not to deject;
Lo! grief's long winter warms; yet what can I expect?

—Ah! were my daimon but of that rare worth
To comfort, rouse and temper me like one
Who matches the spring vigour of old earth
With the unheard-of both conceived and done!
As our coast laughs her flowers to this proud sun,
Praxiteles once fed the loom of skill
With a rare silk of marble and passion spun,
Throwing the glancing shuttle of his will
Till radiance and weight might his queen dream fulfil.

Weak thoughts, weak arms have I, and therefore moan.
In books and minds this is a barren coast!
Among its folk thy head towered up alone:
They of their vines and olives think and boast,
Not of their one man sent the world. At most
Fortune may make me some rich vintner's wife,
Surprise for the lettered guest of such a host.
Ah! the thought stabs my courage like a knife,
Yet I must flatter and nurse it back from dreams to life.

—Look, Courage, beauty drowned lights up our bay,
Peers out through tears in each fresh opened flower
That from the path side greets thee with “Good-day!”
How can a heart resist this dancing hour?

The feet of Olpis thrill with tip-toe power!

—Some evil in unharvested love must lurk,
That as a drop of stale turns fresh milk sour,
Curdles youth: ah! does fresh adventure irk
Me only, while thou glowest with life and love and work?

Our isle's one masterpiece beneath the wave,
Her one rare soul drowned deeper in far lands:
Though Sappho and Aspasia look so brave
Rare is the glory woman's strength commands!
Thy face, this statue, mock at these weak hands.
How should they salvage ocean-whelmèd things
That sink and become dreams, while truth expands
Like calm sea that a rich-shored distance rings
Round one who cannot swim, to whom a halcyon sings?

Come, let me roll this up and seal it too,
Though not to send it, for I know not where.
When they replace our goddess with the new
I'll hang it with a large tress of my hair
Where once her smiling gaze would rest, and there
Hard by the door-post let it swing and sway
With every sea-breath; storm shall clatter, tear
My votive gift and drench it with salt spray,
That the last vestige with my life be worn away.

EPISTLE II
TO
CHARLES SHANNON
AFFECTIONATELY

SENT FROM EGYPT WITH A FAIR ROBE
OF TISSUE TO A SICILIAN VINE-DRES-
SER. 276 B.C.

PUT out to sea, if wine thou wouldest make
Such as is made in Cos : when open boat
May safely launch, advice of pilots take;
And find the deepest bottom, most remote
From all encroachment of the crumbling shore,
Where no fresh stream tempers the rich salt wave,
Forcing rash sweetness on sage ocean's brine;
As youthful shepherds pour
Their first love forth to Battos gnarled and grave,
Fooling shrewd age to bless some fond design.

Not after storm ! but when, for a long spell,
No white-maned horse has raced across the blue,
Put from the beach ! lest troubled be the well ..
Less pure thy draught than from such depth were due.
Fast close thy largest jars, prepared and clean !
Weight each a buoyant womb down through the flood,
Far down ! then, with a cord the lid remove,
And it will fill unseen,
Swift as a heart Love smites sucks back the blood :
This bubbles, deeper born than sighs, shall prove.

If thy bowed shoulders ache, as thou dost haul ..
Those groan who climb with rich ore from the mine;
Labour untold round Ilion girt a wall ;
A god toiled that Achilles' arms might shine ;
Think of these things and double knit thy will !
Then, should the sun be hot on thy return,
Cover thy jars with piles of bladder weed,
Dripping, and fragrant still
From sea-wolds where it grows like bracken-fern :
A grapnel dragged will soon supply thy need.

Home to a tun convey thy precious freight!
Wherein, for thirty days, it should abide,
Closed, yet not quite closed from the air, and wait
While, through dim stillness, slowly doth subside
Thick sediment. The humour of a day
Which has defeated youth and health and joy,
Down, through a dreamless sleep, will settle thus,
Till riseth maiden gay
Set free from all glooms past.. or else a boy
Once more a school-friend worthy Troïlus.

Yet to such cool wood tank some dream might dip:
Vision of Aphrodite sunk to sleep,
Or of some sailor let down from a ship,
Young, dead, and lovely, while across the deep,
Through the calm night, hoarsely his comrades chaunt..
So far at sea, they cannot reach the land
To lay him perfect in the warm brown earth.
Pray that such dreams there haunt!
While, through damp darkness, where thy tun doth stand,
Cold salamanders sidle round its girth.

Gently draw off the clear and tomb it yet
For other twenty days, in cedar casks!
Where through trance, surely, prophecy will set;
As, dedicated to light temple-tasks,
The young priest dreams the unknown mystery.
Through Ariadne, knelt disconsolate
In the sea margin, so welled back and throbbed
A nuptial promise: she
Turned; and, half-choked through dewy glens, some great,
Some magic drone of revel coming sobbed.

Of glorious fruit, indeed, must be thy choice,
Such as has fully ripened on the branch,
Such as due rain, then sunshine, made rejoice,
Which, pulped and coloured, now deep bloom doth
blanch;

Clusters like odes for victors in the games,
Strophe on strophe globed, pure nectar all!
Spread such to dry .. if Helios grant thee grace,
Exposed unto his flames
Two days, or, if not, three; or, should rain fall,
Stretch them on hurdles in the house four days.

Grapes are not sharded chestnuts, which the tree
Lets fall to burst them on the ground, where red
Rolls forth the fruit, from white-lined wards set free,
And all undamaged glows 'mid husks it shed;
Nay, they are soft and should be singly stripped
From off the bunch, by maiden's dainty hand,
Then dropped through the cool silent depth to sink
(Coy, as herself hath slipped,
Bathing, from shelves in caves along the strand)
Till round each dark grape water barely wink;

Since some nine measures of sea-water fill
A butt of fifty, ere the plump fruit peep,
(Like sombre dolphin shoals when nights are still,
Which penned in Proteus' wizard circle sleep,
Where 'twixt them glinting curves of silver glance
If Zephyr, dimpling dark calm, count them o'er)
Thus for two days let the fruit soak, then tread!
While bare-legged bumpkins dance,
Arched spouts will from the bursting presses pour,
And gurgling rills towards the vats run red.

Meanwhile the maidens, each with wooden rake,
Drag back the skins and laugh at aprons splashed ;
Or youths rest, boasting how their brown arms ache,
So fast their shovels for so long have flashed,
Baffling their comrades' legs with mound and heap.
Double their labour ! still the happier they,
Who at this genial task wear out long hours,
Till vast night round them creep,
When soon the torch-light dance whirls them away ;
For gods who love wine treble all their powers.

Iacchus is the always grateful god !
His vineyards are more fair than gardens far ;
Hanging, like those of Babylon, they nod
O'er each Ionian cliff and hill-side scar !
While Cypris lends him saltness, depth, and peace ;
The brown earth yields him sap for richest green ;
And he has borrowed laughter from the sky ;
Wildness from winds ; and bees
Bring honey. Then choose casks which thou hast seen
Are leakless, very wholesome, and quite dry !

At regal tables often a pledged guest,
I can assure thee, having travelled much,
That Coan vintage easily is best.
Faint not before the toil ! this wine is such
As tempteth princes launch long pirate barks ; ..
From which may Zeus protect Sicilian bays,
And, ere long, me safe home from Egypt bring,
Letting no black-sailed sharks
Scent this king's gifts, for whom I sweeten praise
With those same songs thou didst to Chloë sing !

I wrote them 'neath the vine-cloaked elm, for thee.
Recall those nights! our couches were a load
Of scented lentisk; upward, tree by tree,
Thy father's orchard sloped, and past us flowed
A stream sluiced for his vineyards; when, above,
The apples fell, they on to us were rolled,
But kept us not awake. O Laco, own
How thou didst rave of love!
Now art thou staid, thy son is three years old;
But I, who made thee love-songs, live alone.

Muse thou at dawn o'er thy yet slumbering wife!
Not chary of her best was nature there,
Who, though a third of her full gift of life
Was spent, still added beauties still more rare;
What calm slow days, what holy sleep at night,
Evolved her for long twilight trystings fraught
With panic blushes and tip-toe surmise:
And then, what mystic might
All, with a crowning boon, through travail brought!
Consider this and give thy best likewise!

Falter, and even contentment will taste flat!
Welcome me, Laco, with this liquid glee!
I see that red face under thy straw hat,
I see thy house, thy vineyards, Sicily!
Thou dost demur, good but too easy friend!
Come, put those doubts away! thou hast strong lads,
Brave wenches; on the steep beach lolls thy ship
Where vine-clad slopes descend,
Sheltering our bay, that headlong rillet glads,
Like a stripped child fain in the sea to dip.

EPISTLE III
TO
BENJAMIN FLETCHER

IN DELIGHT AT A BOX OF ROSES SENT
FROM LEICESTER TO LONDON JULY 1918

TENDER dawns peep from under night's gray cowl

As from hard buds, pink, crimson, yellow, white,
Their indolent yet lavish-souled avowal
Each day advances; .. loving, trusting light,
Ripening towards that gorgeous disarray
When petals loll and slide to languid heaps;
For every rose confesses all she may
To ease the kindness of her balmy deeps.

Ah, thus the heart would open ! thus the soul
Longs to expand her self-approved intent
In utter shameless bounty ! but, poor fool,
Fears others will read ill what well she meant;
And so, pent-up, her sweetness clots to stone,
And kills the beauty that she dare not own.

Your far-sent roses showing every day
A less restrained abandon, ruined, seem
More magical, more touching yet than they
Were ever while life lifted each sweet dream
Prim with composure through its odorous sleep.
They brought immurèd Psyche to my mind,
Over whose durance, told in tales, men weep,
Though each her jailor be, deaf and unkind.
But there ! I thrust the thought away and smile ;
For these choice blossoms by her fair hand culled,
Prove that you let her fetterless beguile
The summer in deep garden lanes, till, lulled
By flitting song-bird, zephyr-rustled tree,
Her heart grew light enough to think of me.

IDYLLIC MONOLOGUES
TO ANNIE

THESEUS

“What am I? O thou sea, with all thy noise,
Thou tell’st me not:—and thou great sun, that leavest
Once more thy ruby red on little clouds
Where thou hast dived from sight, art mute and art
No parent of an answer to my prayer,
My daily prayer to thee. Those clouds, are they
As I am? and shall I, as they will, lose
What fastens now the eyes of men on me?
Youth, as they say, is that but as yon red
Which dims while I gaze on it, dims and fails
Before the breath of all-disabling night?
It makes me shudder: is there such a breath
To conquer youth and make men lose their glow,
A gulf to swallow youth as night those tints?
And shall I scurry as the storm-chased cloud,
Darkling and teased to tears, and torn with groans?
Ah, must it come upon me to be spent
And no more heard of? Is there a gulf like that?

The men I meet, have they been once like me,
And has a tyrant force so bowed their backs,
Browbeaten them and taught them furtive haste,
Made all their actions relish of escape
From Fate, that only baffler of the gods?
For even the old man, who has lived well
Whose smile of fortitude has blessed and blessed,
Day after day, his friends through fifty years,
When his knees totter and his arm grows weak,
Though the gods love him, yet, to please Fate, he
Must be content to palter and lose all;
’Neath cover of a smile, be quite undone,
Yea, steal away, stand by, and let the grand
Converging circumstances tempt in vain
To some exploit worthy his life laid down,
Needed by all the world, but which weak hands

And knees that shake can now forbid him bring
To masterful fruition. Yea, Fate's fool,
Amidst the dearth of younger men endowed
With spirit and resources like his own,
He must sit down, give counsel, then unsay;
Even as I have had to fume 'mid men
Who lacked my heart, yet owned the strength I lacked,
And watch the chance go by.. feeling it fleet,
The unseized moment when a god cried 'Dare!'
'Tis sullen Fate thus thwarts the hopeful god,
Thus ends the good man, thus begins with me;
Who oftenest, ah! cloudbeth the whole life's course,
Who treads close at the heel, breathes in the neck,
Yet drives no sharp spear crashing through the breast,
Plunges no knife sideways between the ribs,
And cracks the skull beneath no knotty club,
Nor throws a noose about the craning neck,
But fouls the action in the doing, mars
The work between the hands, and wries the thought
Before the lips have shaped it; mocks all hope
With wretched failure, and forbids to mend,
Spurring us ever to disaster new:
It is so, comes upon me, I shall fail;
For I have failed before; each year have failed
To roll this stone aside, which hides the proof,
The sign of whether I am no man's son,
Begotten of a man who wore a sword,
Or of some rascal whose long tongue deceived
A woman's heart. Shame hounds me when I think
That I have cheeks which flush to hear men's praise,
Who cannot say that I am such an one,
And add thereto 'my father sails afar'
Or 'fetcheth golden apples from the tree
That the sweet women sit beneath and sing,'
Or 'is in Cyprus, where he works a mine,'
Or 'followeth wars in Thrace,' or 'seeks a cure'

At Delphi for some strange unkind disease.'
Thus other lads can vaunt and need not come,
What day the sun behind yon little isle,
Each autumn sets for one who standeth here,
They need not come down to this lonely beach
And tug at this dull stone, till they are faint;
Nor as their limbs grow cold ache with despair,
To hope and craven fear not slaves by turns;
And, if they oftener bear defeat in speed
Or when we wrestle, fence, or hurl the quoit,
A father teacheth what there lacked, and how
With greatest likelihood to compass it.

While I

Visit my mother where she sits and works,
As women work, weaving in wall-cloths wide
Figures of men and gods, and hear her talk
As women talk, with smiles and hopeful words.
Oft will she bid me stand in such a way
As Heracles or Jason rightly stand,
Then silently doth bend her to her task,
That she may fill their pictures out from mine;
While I forget her and that busy room,
Watching those heroes lay the red fir poles
Before the prow of Argo on the grass,
High up some glade, high in the forest hills,
Whence the vast Ister and Absyrtus draw
Their waters, and where stags, of huger build
Than horses, stand forth on the brows of cliffs
And bell at man's intrusion, ere they turn
With long quick strides to seek yet virgin wilds.
From morn to eve, before the Argo there,
They laid the poles, then dragged her over them;
And on they toiled, week after week, right up;
Then rigged as 'twere a second keel of plank,
And sledded her across the fields of snow,
And to encircling ocean brought her down.

They did this: I, who helped them in my thought,
Have heard my mother laugh, and waked to know
She could not tell me who my father was."

Thus far the lad with many a heart-drawn sigh;
Then eased his shoulders of their short grey cloak,
And tossed his hat of straw upon the ground.
Firm in vague twilight, naked, fleckless, blond
(Save that a sandal strap still laced each foot
And that his head was dark with clustered curls)
He stood as those whose prayer bestirs mute lips;
Then gravely did approach a sea-worn rock
Halfburied in the shingle, wan; for sand,
With which the scouring wind its slatey hue
Had scored, was lodged in all its hollows; wan
With livid marblings, lonely, rounded, smooth,
Planted as for a bourne unto that sea
Whose hoarse waves gnawed the grating beach hard by.
While, back from there, in dry and yellow reeds
Which belted the cove round, wind rattled bleak.
Beyond, dark hills rose, tranquil as the sky.
Suddenly his curls shook, he felt both arms,
Searched with his feet for purchase, then bent down
And, digging with both hands in the loose beach,
Obtained a thorough grip. His foothold gave
And gave beneath each crooked and straddled leg;
Their knees touched to the beach, pressed in, dug down
While sinews on broad thighs, his hollowed loins,
And curved back hardened, knotted, and showed up:
Sweat, from a streaming forehead, dripped into
Those dangling curls which bounced before his eyes
And teased that burning furnace of his face:
But the stone gave, and his subsiding effort
Sank down upon it shifted in its bed.
Some time he sobbed, then knelt and sucked his hands
Bleeding and numb, and pinched between salt stones:

Rose then ; his knees were raw ; his chin was rasped,
For he had ground it on that sullen block ;
With deep-drawn breaths he poised his limbs in the air,
Relaxed their o'er-strained joints, and chafed their thews ;
And, having mopped his hot brow with his cloak,
Sat down and smiled because the stone had moved.

Ah ! who shall say how his heart's throbs died down,
As war-noise in beleaguered town subsides
At nightfall ; for the sentries clearly see
The foemen building fires to cook their meal.
For then, as women creep out to the walls
To find their wounded husband or dead son,
His fears came out to rummage likelihoods,
Disturb the calculating eye that broods
O'er the main chance, and, (as a hapless girl
That, having sought and sought and nowhere found
Not even a lover's corse to lave and tend,
Fears he may be too-mangled, if not shipped
Afar in noisome mine to feel the lash,
Till, frantic, she run screaming through the night,)
So one surmise bedinned his brain the most,
And made all life seem madness, and the gods
Unhearing scorns at distances extreme.
If he should roll the stone back from a blank,
An empty bed ! His heart stood still ! There was
No future ; such a moment ought to be
The last ! .. yet, as the old gnarled warrior stands
Hearing that girl run mad, so still, within,
There stood a knowledge that foresaw the morn
And the spent tatters of that storm of grief
Subdued, ungoverned, drifting through the streets,
Drift on through wildered prattle, sometimes laugh,
But never know itself and hopes again ;
So, far within, he saw all time succeed,
No consonancy in it with the days ..

Those days of sterling effort, gone before.
He thought it best almost to now give up.
But then the all-conquering hope to find a god,
A hero at the least, had been his sire,
Brought him upon his feet and cleared his mind :
That which was raised from good must go to good ;
But from a lie the fair thing sprung at first
Would be reduced and end in utter waste.

Choosing such larger stones as gave foothold,
He banked them up where he his feet would rest ;
And, having scooped quite clear sufficient grip
For his sore-smarting hands, a second time
He bowed his back and worked down with his knees,
And heeded not annoy from clammy curls,
But put his soul into his boyish arms,
And hugged and raised the stone, then rolled it over,
Dragged by sheer weight himself, dragged sideways
down...

Not long to lie, for he had seen ! now saw !
(For into heaven, lo ! the moon had glid,
Between their woods the dewy hills were grey,
And 'mid the reeds lagoons were pathed with light,
While countless silver patines danced at sea,)
Saw ! saw ! in sheath of inlay capped with gold
A sword, its baldrick, and beneath, a shield
Cased in a leathern bag, but printed through,
And on the bag large words, " My son, my Theseus,
That worthy of thy sire now hast proved,
Come to me, come to Attica, in Athens,
Ask for King Ægeus, and bring with thee these. "

MEDEA

Much am I wronged, and Colchis far away
I curse; for there this tortured heart first beat..
Ah, gently as the summer aspen's leaves
Then beat! but now, I know not if it beat,
Or hath but recollection of loud thuds,
That drearily echo through its stony wards.

—Severe Orthia, mistress of my youth,
Thwart Hecate, that scowledst on my choice
When I was even so foolish as to love,
Artemis, that repairest the youth of trees
And yearly fledgest woodland glades with fern,
This have I woven, this my needle wrought
Slowly to beauty (as thy Spring adorns,
Fold after fold, a rich and worthy land)
With leaves of varied shape, with tints of green
More subtly diverse than the lyre's notes,
With blossoms of a flute-like rapturous hue,
Sheer bliss in blue, in pink or purple sobs,
Deep drone of reds and saffrons, shouts of gold:
And not content with this, but, god-like still
(Since through the dusky inwards of the wood,
Between the branches, wings the feathered life
Whose rapid pulse astonishes the hand
Of ill-shod mortals trudging after joy)
I have portrayed tit, finch, or crested wren,
Flashing athwart each sombre interspace
My broidered wreaths encircled; but the snake,
The silent pole-cat, fierce red ant, the wasp..
These, though my thoughts were like them, are not here.
Yet here is what might make the forest groan,
To think its wizard influence had failed
Impress on any life a character
So secretly dread, though framed to almost please..
This brown, not, like that of dead leaves, inert..
This brown rich like the burnt cheek of a stone

Squared to be plinth unto some column grand;
Near which the masons light a little fire,
Whereat to broil their salt-dried fish in lard,
When o'er the cockling scales and stiff-ribbed fins,
Again, such browns mingled with golds, blue dusk,
And silver scorched, increase beneath the heat;
While sometimes, in the afternoon, a storm,
Parting his heavy indigo palls of rain,
Will show such browns above the sulphurous west..
This brown, the dye in which I soused my web,
Is colour of poison; and for this is veiled
The light which else would make my chamber bland
As those which women love, or wives or maids,
To have for toilet, sleep, close thought, and prayer.
But I to Hecate have prayed alone,
And have foregone sweet aspect of white sheets
Which only where the light abounds seem pure;
And, for two months, have laboured without air,
Till I am livid, and this silver disk
Changes not hue to tell me I am sick,
But gives back eyes alone that look like life,
And all the rest like death, like Jason's love!

For I was married and ravished from afar,
And, for some gentle words and easy smiles,
Pretence of heat, effected, for that man,
All he had failed in else.. to plough with bulls,
And sow the dragon's teeth, and those to slay
Who, fully-armed, sprang like a field of corn
Not through three months, but in three minutes, ripe;
These I enabled him to reap, and seize
The sacred serpent-guarded fleece of gold:
For, like a girl, I thought love was a god,
And I had lived in boundless hopes of love;
Nor wearied reading scrolls of crabbed signs,
Nor ceased from skilful practice of my hands,

Whether I sprinkled sweet herbs over meats,
Or did distil tart syrups from rank canes,
Or ground to powder dried and pregnant roots,
Or with precisest measure mingled draughts
Compelling slumber or restoring health:
And, with a pride beyond my little size,
Scorned brawny suitors for their ignorance,
And gazed across the thrilling sea with hope,
Or kept my wakeful eyes upon the stars,
Whose millions intimate a prodigal power
Which, then, my eager thought assigned to love.
This fervency I, with myself, bestowed
On Jason for lip music and a smile.
And not this only, for a perjured man
I brought to childhood back, thine aged foe,
Aeson, my courteous bridegroom's palsied sire..
The soiled and blunted weapon doubled up,
Which oft thee wounded deep, Virginity;
For many wives his lust had gloried in,
And crowds of children from his veins had drained,
In petty and diluted measures, blood
That once was opulent, almost divine:
I, having drawn that weakness from his limbs
Which torpid now and chilly there abode,
Through every vacant artery did force
The green and joyous sap of thriving plants
(Juice of crushed stalks mixed with their ropy gums,
And purpled bright with strength from berry and grape,
Full of a stinging, swift and masterful
Vivacity) his heart beat fast once more;
The man, remade, well-nigh resembled fauns
Who, houseless, worship trees .. a white-haired child
That, henceforth, sang himself to death in woods,
And bathed for very rapture in tall corn
And, silver-maned, by night the hill-brows haunted..
His eyes, the wonder and envy of younger men,

Beaming with joyance far surpassing theirs.
But in return for this, my husband wooes
Ripe Glauçē, Corinth's daughter, and would bring
A second victim home unto his bed.
Therefore, I know that love is but a dream;
And with this toil have wholly purged my mind,
The while my pauseless needle stitched and stitched;
Setting my thought on baneful Hecate,
To rid myself of hope that dupeth all.
And energy in me has so increased,
That now I feel my thought doth correspond
With that which wields the empire of the stars,
And fills sheer darkness with a smell of blood,
And sends the green growth forth from gloomy earth
With gifts, some good, the more part charged with
harm,
But all disguised to attract, and those the most,
The deadliest, or least helpful. Thine I am,
Mother of Wolves delighting in the blood
Of dogs whom men have tamed, with pains and skill,
To guard their homes: thou Queen of Fears, whose lair
Is reached through endless caves; whose silver lamp,
Changeful and cold, distresseth female sleep..
Driving for them all comfort from the night
With counsel to fond ruin from despair,
Urging them no more battle with their fate,
Not choose like thee virginity, but hope
Beyond themselves and eye the virile youth;
Yet only in our hearts do those goods dwell
Which we so fondly seek in lustful man.

For one who eyed no youth, a man mature..
For Glauçē, apt to love, have I prepared
This gown, so fit to fascinate the eye
Of a fond vanity-indulging bride.
Behold how it designedly is cut;

Look, goddess, am I careful to succeed,
With open slashes left along the sleeve,
Where the white radiancy of arms shall shine?
See, see, the bosom is, beween the breasts,
To tempt her not to wear an undervest,
Pinked with sweet open-work, which creamy tints
Become far better than a cold white smock!
And I, indeed, do send the like advice
With this, my wedding gift, which now I crease
In strictly even folds upon the floor,
And thus incase, first with a veil of lawn,
Then matted yew sprigs packed in layers deep
Both against light and chemic influence
Of Helios proof; in double thickness, last,
Of this new canvas bag, and cord it, so,
With scarlet; and my seeming kindly words,
Such as an aged wife might give to one
Whose youthful warmth shall solace her aged lord,
Here I insert beneath the knot, inscribed
On ivory tablets with style dipped in red.

As though I ne'er had married, Hecate,
Thine am I; and oh, shortly, when this robe
So gaily bloomed, so leafy, and so fair,
Draped on his second dupe, shall proudly meet
The warmth of nuptial altar-fires and sun,
At first with pleasant tingling, but soon, soon,
From smart increasing fast to blister and burn,
And scald, and seethe, and gnaw upon the flesh
It ever closer clings to .. in his sight,
Devouring those soft charms, the hope to enjoy
Had tempted him to call a second "Bride" ..
Soon, soon when I for thee, in utter dark
Have put away my nearest, most real, hopes,
With a keen knife producing savour of blood
To fill thy tingling dark, Orthia dread;

My motherhood undone, returned to thee
With, for peace-offering dire, my murdered boys,
Who, if they lived, must live to be, or soon
Or late, supplanted by another's births
(Ah, thirty years envies their five and six,
Life's sweetest, closed at once, exempt from worse!)
Thou, who art cruel too, but to be kind,
Propitiated by infanticide,
O give me part in life the self-complete!
Like to a shooting star, direct and swift,
In dragon-harnessed chariot, dip, dip down!
Glide near the earth, when, from it passing, thou
Shalt, out from blinding silver reaching forth,
Lift me beside thee, Virgin pure and strong;
And I will never more consider love,
Nor stoop to hope, but spend my days as thine
In governance of herbs, and caves, and tides,
Stars, and frail strays of virgin life, are spent.

MEDEA
TO
BERYL DE ZOETE

THE CHARACTERS
THE CURTAIN BEARER MALE
TWO CURTAIN FOLDERS FEMALE
PROTO A NYMPH
MEDEA WIFE of JASON KING of CORINTH
MERMEROS SON OF MEDEA VOICED BY
THE FIRST FOLDER
PHERES SON OF MEDEA VOICED BY THE
SECOND FOLDER

NOTE

My friend W. B. Yeats asked me to try my hand, having himself achieved brilliant success, in this new form of drama, independent of stage and scenery and suitable for chamber presentation.

The BEARER enters with the folded curtain. He bows to the assembly and then addresses them:

You doubt of ghost and angel, god and jinn?
You think those bodied like you, the sole speakers
Who put a show of wisdom into words
Here on this planet piebald with pale seas?
Well, those less hood-winked with to-day, still hear
Voices in chancelled grove and panelled room;
I ask your minds to shake off their stale faith
That things are always merely what they seem,
Since thought can run too long on such smooth rails.
Let me transport you back to ancient Greece
Where the most travelled and smart-witted knave
Trembled, accompanied by an invisible crowd
That could at will appal his ear or eye:
Some neutral daimons like myself, and some
Malignant ghouls, but some exquisite beings
God, goddess or tree-cloister's naked nun,
Dryad with doe-like glance and furtive step.
Yes, then the man whose wink steadied the market,
Had not one doubt that though the body rot
Helpless in earth, yet might its wraith be met
On soundless phantom feet abroad by night
To thwart or prosper those with clay-clogged shoes.
[turning and beckoning to two females who have entered]
Come hither, sisters, help me fold Time's woof
From off an acre of the Arcadian field,
Till what occurred three thousand years ago
Be watched again to-night by these choice friends
Whose kindly leisured looks invite our art.
[He stands in the centre in front, and while they come to either side and begin to unfold the curtain from him he says]
Grief dwells with life,
Joy's limping and wry-necked shadow,
So the old live with the young:

Courage has pain for wife,
And he dies a fool with these words on his tongue
“In an instant I shall have done with pain,
And never wish to be dead again.”

[while they refold the curtain, he says]

“Yea, thou art still,”

Cries the phantom shaken with fever,
“Cold flesh needs never to ease an ache
But I, I walk and am ill.

O for a sleep too sound to wake,
That a soul might really have done with pain,
Who had swallowed their nostrum death in vain!”
[As the curtain was refolded, a gold rock has been discovered on the floor. THE BEARER now takes the folded curtain and, laying it flat along the floor, squats some way behind it. THE FIRST FOLDER remains in front saying] Look up through the leaves,
The moon rides high;

This silence seems to wait
For music, it even deceives
The ear with the far-off cry
Of a chase...nay, can dilate
The picturing eye with nymphs that run
Short-kilted after the stag.

SECOND FOLDER [who has commenced to follow the BEARER] Hush! our office here is done.

FIRST FOLDER [turning] Fear not, I will not lag
Though this tree-pillared place
Be carpeted with moon-light lace.

[They sit down on either side of the BEARER.]

SECOND FOLDER

Mortal footsteps, hark!

CURTAIN BEARER Among them fall
Those that bear a laden heart.

SECOND FOLDER Whose are they?

FIRST FOLDER I guess, for I already feel

A childish will seek control of my powers.

[Wimples her head in grey lawn.]

SECOND FOLDER

When next she speaks the voice will be another's.

Can you tell whose?

CURTAIN BEARER

When have I led you blindly?

Medea comes seeking her murdered boys.

One little fellow gains by our friend's trance

And soon the younger will be served by yours.

SECOND FOLDER

Why did she murder them?

CURTAIN BEARER Jason, her husband,

Tired of her; at Corinth, jurists held

The rites by which he wed her in far Colchis

Were nought but wizardry, and ruled him free

To espouse the daughter of their king ...

But there! I waste my breath, your head is clouded.

[The SECOND FOLDER has wimpled her head in grey lawn and he continues to the audience]

We had been overheard but that they stir

The boughs so, brushing through the thicket hither.

Yet had we been, they must have deemed shrubs talked;

For we are junipers to mortal eyes.

[Enter PROTO, a nymph carrying a light hunting javelin, followed by MEDEA with bow and quiver slung over her shoulder.]

PROTO

Listen, I think I heard them.

MEDEA [as to herself and wringing her locked hands]

Oh, I hear them!

PROTO

This wide-backed billow of the forest floor

Cuts off sound from beyond it;

They may be nearer us than one would think.

MEDEA [unkilting her skirt] Nearer than one would think.

PROTO

The rise is trifling and so sparsely treed,
We may cross at a run to the further slope and never
Fetch a short breath before we hear them clearly,
Nay, very likely, see.

MEDEA [straightening up]

Hear them clearly, nay, very likely, see.

PROTO You bandy me my words, you sullen echo.
First, you fell out on purpose, now refuse
To make an effort to rejoin the hunt:
You crane your ear where nothing's to be heard,
Though from yon vantage ground we might...

MEDEA [interrupting]

I hear!

PROTO What do you hear?

MEDEA That which I listen for.
Leave me.

PROTO The Goddess charged me not to leave you.
Else I'd not loiter here, but should now plunge
One of the foremost through the tallest bracken
Or leap the fallen poles in some new clearing.

MEDEA [who has been listening to something else]
Did you not hear that? then?

PROTO Not the least sound.

MEDEA I'm sure I heard my children shout at play,
Not far from here.

PROTO I thought that they were dead?

MEDEA

Yes, yes, they are. May not dead children play?

PROTO Was it a fever took them?

MEDEA Never you mind!

Be silent, let me listen.

[A pause.]

PROTO I assure you there was no outward sound;
A fancy born of sorrow has deceived you.

MEDEA More likely they are shy while you are here:
Come, take a run up yonder as you meant to,

Glance down the glades, hearken for the halloo
And then come back. I will wait here alone.

PROTO

You think their phantoms may be here to-night?

MEDEA Yes, they must long for me as I for them:
Alive they were shy of strangers; you daunt them, you
Must quit me and they'll scamper to my arms.

PROTO I dare not do it; I...

MEDEA [interrupting] What do you fear?
The forest, or the night, or loneliness?

PROTO [hesitatingly]

You know that the...

MEDEA Always afraid! of caves,
Of hollow trees; your shadow must not fall
Towards them as you pass! Mere words there are
That you turn white at...

PROTO But the goddess...

MEDEA Yes.

Orthia, she drinks blood. Hecate... there
You blench! Those names are hers as much
As Cynthia is, which trees on summer nights
Will whisper audibly in adoration;
For she it was ordained their tall green growth.

PROTO

We must obey her least command; but you...

MEDEA [interrupting] My girlhood studied
Manifold Delia under every aspect,
Not merely as the huntress Artemis
Or as Selene guiding her bright moon.

PROTO Yet you betrayed your virgin vow and so...

MEDEA [interrupting]

Hark, there they are again!

PROTO That proves you dream it!

For I was listening.

MEDEA Ears can listen, yes;
But the heart hears. I need to speak with them..

I ache for their forgiveness. There was no time...
How could I tell them? ... Oh, their dying eyes
Reproached me, thought their mother was not kind!

PROTO I pity your distress but how can I...

MEDEA [interrupting]

You must...if blood has any natural leap
Or sudden power in you.

PROTO You but dream..

If I could hear what you pretend to...

MEDEA [interrupting] "Pretend!"
Is your mind frozen? "Pretend!" You lump of ice,
You shall!

PROTO What! disobey our Sovran Lady?

MEDEA

Pretend that you were driven off with blows;
The bruise to excuse you need not be a bad one.
Lend me your spear, the butt of the shaft will serve.
[PROTO yields her javelin but at the same time instinctively increases her distance.]

MEDEA When a bough intercepts your hot career
You take pride not to moan.

[turning away with resentment]

I would not hurt you half as much as a fall.

PROTO

What do those fierce eyes think they see in me?

MEDEA A live doll nigh as friendly as a stone.

PROTO I never have refused to talk with you.

MEDEA

Words answer words; what answers the hurt mind,
And deep-panged heart? have you felt nothing? never?
[suddenly starting as though hearing something]

Ah! there again, quite near!

FIRST FOLDER [without moving, in a childish voice] Talking, always talking.

SECOND FOLDER [without moving, in a childish voice] She's busy still.

MEDEA

You heard?

PROTO I don't think so.

MEDEA

You did!

PROTO

You're mad;

And oh! I doubt my senses, doubting yours.

MEDEA

Come, come, one good blue bruise upon that shoulder!

[striking at PROTO who avoids the blow]

Coward! [stamping with vexation]

Let me then, with this arrow,

Ever so slightly notch your dullard ear;

'Twill drip and stain your shift, whence you adduce

Complete defence, saying I shot at you.

PROTO

What a perverse ruling was that which made you

Fellow of our chaste college, after years

On earth, a man-used thing, that has lived stived

In wicked palaces!

MEDEA Ha, if you but dreamed

What these two hands have done!

PROTO

Done! what?

MEDEA

Were you

To hear, horror would spring upon your back

And ride as a lynx on a doe's neck rides; then

I'd listen to your panic crashing far

Through the still woods. Come, lend an ear!

PROTO [clapping her hands over her ears] No, no!

MEDEA

For me your flight will mean unspeakable solace ..

[coming close and catching PROTO'S hand away from one ear] I killed my children ..

[freeing PROTO'S hand] Run..

[again advancing] Two little boys ..

[with a gesture of impatience]

Be off! Are you too weak-kneed? How can I

Give you the strength to be the sheep you are?

PROTO [hoarsely] Did you not love them?

MEDEA My children?

PROTO Yes.

MEDEA

What can your listless bowels know of love?

Hunger for their forgiveness gnaws at mine.

How could I tell them ere they felt the steel?

Expected .. the blow had been far, far more cruel! ..

Cannot those eyes acquit me? When my knife

Had sacrificed my darlings to Orthia

She pardoned me that mutiny, my marriage,

In dragon-coursered car made apparition,

And brought my penitence home .. home to this forest.

PROTO I know the goddess has forgiven you, but...

MEDEA Is it you cannot forgive!

FIRST FOLDER [as before]

Send her to sleep, mother.

MEDEA [as though someone had whispered in her ear] I will, I will.

PROTO [in awe]

Lunacy doubles her voice to call and answer!

What is her sick will now?

[MEDEA, turning on PROTO, advances waving the javelin like a magician's wand.]

PROTO [in terror, as she runs in on MEDEA and seizing both her hands drags them down, and falls on to her knees at MEDEA'S feet] Stay! Stop! I dread
The use of spells; 'tis such a ticklish thing ..

Trip on a word, and though you would call sleep,
The never-ending trance obeys and done is done,
Despite belated effort, past all mending.

Prick my ear rather or black and blue my shoulder!

MEDEA [flings the suppliant aside and, raising the javelin with both arms above her head, stands stiff and invokes] By that hen-dragon coiled in the abyss,

I now invoke thee, irresistible Drowse
That fell on Argus, seize her, hold her, numb
Both mind and body, but so that she, a witness,
May deem she dreams what cannot be expressed
Or must surpass belief.

[PROTO stands rapt in sleep.]

CURTAIN BEARER

Done, at last! and, now, hast thou gained aught?

MEDEA I am free, alone!

CURTAIN BEARER

Therefore I voice thy thought.

MEDEA My thought? Who art thou?

CURTAIN BEARER

I speak for silenced visions in thy mind:

Their wise tongues, long refused a hearing, tell thee
This is the second failure of thy life!

MEDEA To be alone is vital to the mind
As water to the body. Let me drink;
I have not tasted solitude for weeks.

CURTAIN BEARER

I am the cistern of thy loneliness;
Drink, peer down at thy face, dip, plunge!
Need pool invite the diver? shade at noon
Plead with the way-farer?
I leave my virtue free as they do theirs.

MEDEA Am I alone, only to be self-mocked?

CURTAIN BEARER

This is the second failure of thy life,
And threatens worse than when thou lettedst Jason
Enter that woodland temple, thy young mind.

MEDEA Knowing I fail, why can I not unsay
The spell? set Proto free? and join the chase?

CURTAIN BEARER Why longest thou again
For that close-mingled life of mother and child?

MEDEA I long, and care not why.

CURTAIN BEARER

Was not a life

In cool fast-rooted forest thy first dream?

MEDEA Yes.

CURTAIN BEARER At ten years old,
Slim votress of intrepid Artemis,
Didst thou not pace the pillared glades by night,
Both when the trees were still as brooded thought
And when they surged with ocean eloquence?

MEDEA

What ailed me to throw off that consecration?

CURTAIN BEARER

Why, gallant looks, the common lure of women!

MEDEA [with a wounded cry] Ah! be silent!

[pacing in agony to and fro]

Trees promised renewed health to my despair
When I came back heart-wrecked from Jason's house,
The mother murdered in me...

[looking up she addresses Artemis in the moon]

Has not their blood..

Mine own most precious blood, shed by these hands
Appeased thee, thou pure Huntress of the Soul,
White Moon, that tunest silence to a prayer?

[She lifts both hands and prays mutely. THE FOLDERS remain in their places but lend their voices as hitherto to her invisible children.]

MERMEROS [in a low voice as though approaching to surprise]

They're both there still.

PHERES Has mother killed that nymph?

MERMEROS No, no.

She chanted her to sleep; I told her to.

PHERES What, standing?

MERMEROS Hide!

PHERES There is no need to hide, they cannot see us.

MERMEROS

Hide from hearing, hide in silence. Hush.

[Their whispers become inaudible.]

MEDEA [despondingly] Alas, my heart
Is more a mother than ever it was a bride.
Temptation grips me now more savagely
Than when I followed Jason; even while
I prayed, I heard their voices whispering,
And my thought, far from soaring like a stem
On tip-toe with allegiance to its Queen,
Cowered and dared defy her strict command:
“To seek no good from others but cherish good
In the cold cradle of integrity” ... There! my two boys
Are all the good I seek...

[listens] I must have heard
Or dreamed their voices; let me at least know which.
If they are there, I'll win forgiveness from them
And that is what I yearn for most of all.

—Whisper, O trees, where are they now? Did not
Their voices flit like birds among you lately?
Or was I heart-deceived? —Darlings, listen
I am your mother still, though I took back
The life I gave. My love preferred you dead
Rather than wronged, unbodied rather than
Betrayed to most precarious servitude.

[She looks anxiously all round.]
I hear no longer your clear happy voices.
Forgive me, call again, O call again!

[listens]
—They must have wandered off—Or are you hiding?
BOTH FOLDERS [as before give a burst of chil-
dish laughter as though it had been long suppressed.]
PHERES We hid.

MERMEROS Silence is now our hiding place.

MEDEA [searching eagerly behind the rock]
Where? Where?

PHERES To find us you must make us laugh.

MEDEA [distractedly leaping up]

Ah! how can I, who cannot see you, laugh?

[A second burst of laughter.]

MEDEA

You're really there?

MERMEROS We're found because we laughed.

PHERES That's the new game.

MERMEROS

I said "Now we must hide" but Pheres said

"She cannot see us, there's no need to hide."

Then I said "Hide from hearing, hide in silence,
We'll not be found there till she makes us laugh."

PHERES

That's the new hide-and-seek we play at now.

MEDEA [incredulously]

But are you really there? You move about?

BOTH BOYS

Yes, we are here, and run and leap and laugh.

MEDEA [kneeling on one knee and holding out her arms] Come, I have much to whisper, heart to heart.

MERMEROS

What a beautiful bow you've got.

PHERES Bend it, mother!

MEDEA I want your pardon, you can only give it
When you shall know how cruel were the wrongs...

BOTH BOYS [interrupting]

Shoot, mother, shoot.

MERMEROS The summer night is short,
We must go back to our graves, before it dawns.

MEDEA [still kneeling, has drawn an arrow to its head and now throws both bow and arrow down]

That's how I bend it: now reward me, cuddle,
And let me whisper; dears, your father meant
Another woman's sons should take your places,
Be princes in your stead, and that your mother...

BOTH BOYS [interrupting]

Yes, yes, but shoot; we want to see you shoot!

MERMEROS

Make it hail arrows like a storm. Hit trees!

PHERES Yes, arrows plug in wood with a fine thud.

MEDEA Come close, I want to fondle curly polls.

MERMEROS

Your hands have lost all touch for our hair now.

MEDEA O cruel Mermeros, forgive poor mother.

BOTH BOYS

There's not much time; don't waste it, draw and shoot!

MEDEA Is it so bad exchange.. this moonlit life
For brutal days, kind trees for angry men?

MERMEROS

We have grand times now the moon is up; take aim!

MEDEA [having kilted her skirt she lifts the bow,
aims and, laying it down, says]

That's right, now listen. Only because her home
Lay far across the sea was mother scorned...

MERMEROS

Ho! there scuttles a rabbit—come on, Pheres!

[MEDEA looks about distractedly, trying to divine
in which direction they have pursued the rabbit.]

CURTAIN BEARER [accompanied by MEDEA'S
dance or pantomime]

Seeing, but not seen

Save of the timid, dumb

Creatures who have no thought;

They went, have turned and come.

PHERES Mother, we're back.

MERMEROS He burrowed before we got there.

But not from fear of us.

PHERES

No, now the forest creatures let us stroke them.

MEDEA Stroke me.

MERMEROS We do, but your skin does not tell you.

PHERES A squirrel, Mermeros, be quick, hurrah!

CURTAIN BEARER [MEDEA as before]

Near but not like,

Foreign as things from Ind,
They, intangible, viewless, can
Be fondled less than wind.

MERMEROS

Though we move now as easily as the air
They often win the race.

PHERES They love the fun.

MEDEA Are you so fine-spun? My insensitive earth
Aches to dissolve in air.

MERMEROS I saw an ear

Move in that fern-cave; let's creep in on him.

CURTAIN BEARER [MEDEA as before]

Glad-voiced, they flood

With joy the deep heart-springs,
But ignorant and young,
Speak but of trivial things.

PHERES Rabbits are glad to see us, Mother, now.

MERMEROS

We peep into their homes and watch them eat.

MEDEA

Come, come, forgive your cruel mammy, darlings;
She hurt you so, to save you...

BOTH BOYS That's over now.

MERMEROS

The wounds no longer hurt and Pheres cries
Only on dark thick-clouded nights, or when
It rains.

MEDEA

Ah! then?

PHERES Then Mermeros cries..

MERMEROS Not loud;

We crawl for shelter under eaves of rock.

MEDEA

And whimper there together, poor, poor loves!

PHERES

Mermeros has been up above the trees
He is so brave, and when I am, we both
Will up and up to visit a small star.

MERMEROS

That must be on a still, fine, moonless night.

PHERES

Come, hunt us, mother, we will be your stags.

MERMEROS

Short time is left us, for I smell the dawn.

Shoot by ear, you cannot aim by sight.

[Second dance, MEDEA moving about and aiming in various directions, always relinquishing her intention before freeing the arrow while the CURTAIN BEARER says]

Though they scamper through the dewy grass,
Not a bead they shake!

And, though they through those curtains pass
That spiders between bushes make,
No film of web they break.

PHERES I'm in the pine tree's cleft.

MERMEROS And I, I stand on the rock.

CURTAIN BEARER

Too bold once, even for games too timid now,
Her wavering arrow taps her shaken bow.

PHERES Aim, mother, more to the left,
Here I stand stiff as a stock.

CURTAIN BEARER

Against such naked charm, weapons are vain,
She cowers, pierced where worse-than-arrows rain.

MERMEROS [as MEDEA recovers and makes a last effort to aim and shoot]

Your arrow now points straight at me;
Before you move it, set it free.

CURTAIN BEARER

From behind that oak a goddess took aim,
Out from the moon her silver shaft came.

MERMEROS

Pheres, edge round for fear the Nymph be hit.

PHERES

She's a tower of sleep, I climb to her top to sit.

CURTAIN BEARER

A tower of grief, the prison of woe,
She drops her arrow, lets fall her bow.

PHERES

Why, what's the matter, mother? won't you play?

MEDEA I cannot.

MERMEROS Why, mother,
If you could kill us with the knife we felt,
Surely you can loose the arrow we shan't feel at us!

MEDEA Only if mother looks into your eyes,
Can her tale earn the pardon that she needs.

—I must and will have visible, palpable treasures.
There is a spell of might to effect the change,
—Wait but an instant, you shall fill my arms.

[invoking]

O thou fire-white Nemesis
In the heart profound,
Sister of the form that is
Beauty born to touch and sight
With whom the waves are crowned,
I implore thy viewless might!
Transfuse thy radiant sister, her will moulding,
To grant these gracious forms Death is withholding
Their return to...

PHERES [in terror]

Stop, mother, stop.

MERMEROS [in terror] Lay down your rod!
Ah! must our wounds throb, throb and bleed anew?

[They both shriek.]

MEDEA [reversing the arrow]

I revoke my prayer; be kind,

O grant it not!..

Fire-core of heart-searching Fate,

That destroyest to create,

O grant it not!..

[She throws herself down in despair.]

PHERES [sobbing]

You did not know those words would hurt so, did you?

MERMEROS [sobbing]

Mother, it dawns, we must to our snug graves.

PHERES Lay some new toys on them for us to find:
Two bows and arrows like yours, but not so heavy.

MERMEROS

Two little image bows, we play with images.

MEDEA [distractedly rising to her knees]

O darlings, can't you stay to have one game?

BOTH BOYS [their voices fading out upon the air]

No, mother, no, no, no, no, no.

MEDEA [throwing herself down again]

Not mine, no longer mine! the pallid moon

Is more a mother to you than I am,

Cheers you, consoles you, plays with you,

And has no tedious need for your forgiveness.

PROTO [who has commenced to stir and rub her eyes,
shaking off the magic drowse]

Have I slept?.. standing? Yet that is not so strange

As dreams I have had. My heart still aches, as hurt by
Some memory my mind would lure again.

Which slips from thought, leaving me moved, but
blank.

[with a gesture of bewilderment, then a low laugh]

Tantalizing! To nearly touch remembrance,

Yea, almost feel its wings as it escapes!

Enticed thus I've seen chaffinches in snow
Wait till I neared and stooped, then fly on further,
Repeatedly conjuring hope only to mock it;
So now I catch at darting recollections.

[gazing round]

Sunlight has paled the moon, coloured the leaves,
And, though it have not yet probed to this ground,
Somewhere must warm bare hills. Thus too, a glow
Wells through my heart, born from this dream that's
flown,

Tender, perplexing ...

[stooping she picks up her javelin, then coming forward
and seeing MEDEA] Ah! Poor stricken thing!

I have disliked and feared you, now I feel
Deep pity at the sight of your prostration.
If there be remedy for broken vows
I'll help you to recovery.

[She kneels down beside MEDEA.]

[THE CURTAIN BEARER AND FOLDERS
bring the curtain forward.]

FOLDERS [as they open it out]

The beauty of the wilderness
Has most power when
'Tis temple for a heart's distress.

Were there no men
No forest would be lone,
Nor any ocean moan,
But trees, in unbewildering number, stand,
And soulless din churn an undafened strand.

BEARER [while FOLDERS refold the CURTAIN
showing that the actors have withdrawn and the rock
been removed]

Death is life veiled
By the pang which destroys the senses.
Passion survives : and more daintily limbed,
Man has to ail as he ailed:

His new habiliment, though dimmed,
Yet shines, by turns, transfigured again
As immortal beauty recovers from pain.
[ALL THREE then bow and withdraw.]



EXULTATIONS AND ADORATIONS

CHORUS OF GREEK GIRLS

WE maidens are older than most sheep,
Though not so old as the rose-bush is;
We are only as pretty as that.
We are gay as the weather. Our minds are deep
Like wells, as any boy tells
By the blushes he dares not kiss.
The hills are fond of our chat;
We dance and shake like ringing bells,
Till our hair tumbles out of our hoods.
The boys are away in the woods,
Hunting the boar or the bear.
But joy is here as well as there;
Pretend to fly
Up into the sky,
Jumping with both feet together,
Holding out like wings
Your sleeves and things.
Feeling as light as a feather,
Never wonder whether
The day be long
Or the night short,
Since all our thought
(Big as the song
Of a brown fussy bee)
But just fills the flower which we
Each call "Me."

A DAUGHTER OF ADMETUS

APOLLO kept my father's sheep,
For love of him I cannot sleep;
Far on the hills a dog will bark;
The stars move browsing up the dark;
Their lambs, like dust for number, graze
On night and fill me with amaze;
Brooding how he now tells the tale
Of yonder flock, has worn me pale;
My fingers ache to comb his locks;
All wings for wonder my heart knocks
Against her cage.. would dash abroad,
Head for, and nest with her adored!

ENDYMION'S PRAYER

COMING, the moon paled the sky's brink
As mine eyes closed,

Yet over the west, ready to sink,

Faint she reposed

When I awoke. Had she but climbed the sky,

Gazed down, made bright

The hill-top, where dog-guarded, my

Flock passed the night?

Nay, she in majesty descended

From night's noon, knee'd the turf and bended

Over my lucid sleep to find

Silver, naked, nearer than thought

Her tenderer likeness in my mind!

Am I, through crystal clarity wrought

Into like intimate possession,

Hers?... Ah! mine it may be sips

With wordless passionate confession

Like worship from immortal lips!

—Most keen, most pure, most single spirit,

Even this next night bestow

Due end on me

Who know all heart need know;

Lest baser happening inherit

Felicity,

Leave thou this shape of joy mere stone

Thrilled though inert, thine though alone!

SEMELE

SEMELE lay in bliss all night,
Loved and loving without light,
Blind, but tingling like a string
Struck by dying poet when
Glorified he ceases sing
Listened to by gods and men.

Semele dared a wish .. to see ;
That her eyes might equals be
With her heart and lips and ears :
Night on perfect night she pled.
Sudden lightning drank her tears,
Life and sweetness : she lay dead.

Semele dying thus yet bare
Fiery rapid Bacchus fair
Who, nursed by goddesses and in
High heaven reared, hath since progressed
Throughout all Asia with the din
Of cymbal, drum and voice possessed.

THE GOLDEN THIGH

LISTEN! our Semele

Through her Bacchus tapped thy greatness, Zeus:
And, lodged between thy thews,
Took part in thee.

Throbbing, a god's pain wrestled with our blood,
And flesh divine was big with woman's son!

His second womb!.. a more congenial place

For all he should be! Let the ichor run

From nets that cradle, ichor pulse and race

Through that new maze of veins

Which feeds his limbs and brains!

Each flower's form is thus won from Apollo;

Not from his offer ..in his pride's despite..

Subtracted from the source of light..

By weakness patient-wise to follow

Affection's lead, which yet the event proves right.

Woman conceived thy last and peerless son,

Who, youngest, pushed adventure farthest,

Bade the vintage cap the harvest,

And nearest to pure rapture won,

Was best-beloved, most sudden, most inventive!

His mother from our darkness drew incentive

For urgent prayer unto that power which took

And gave from out the night..

Which heard and shook

Its energy into a blaze of light,

And with compliance cleansed her being

Of all that so had hindered seeing.

Only what in her child might live already

Remained of one who saw the soul which loved her:

Nor was her wish thereby reproved as heady;

Like hand, withdrawn from all that gloved her,

That clasps and holds loved hand quite still,

Her will held in thy will.

IO

“BEAUTIFUL nymph all white with fear,
Stay with me, share with me, dream with me here,
A night, a month, a year!”

“Shepherd, shepherd, I am loved; I am cursed!
And the woes to be suffered may yet be the worst.”

“Corals have I who dwell in a cave;
White trembler, though brown as a rock, I am brave;
Break over my breast, sad wave!”
“Fisher, fisher, I am chased; I am blessed!
But the joys as yet tasted are far from the best.”

“Her youth peeped through her tattered cloak!
She was white; we are black, we Ethiop folk;
She shuddered when we spoke!”

“Great Zeus, great Zeus! I am thine, I am pure!
Thy touch but not theirs will my soul endure!”

“White Cloud, no more driven! O Feminine Youth,
Rest! oaks at Dodona have told thee the truth,
Behold I fondle and soothe!”

“Grandly, grandly I am loved, I am kissed!
Above me the eyes of the stars all mist;
A warm wind sighs;
Egypt, our noble bed,
Hushed nuptial and secret lies;
I am sure, I can feel that my cheeks are red..
Are kissed and red!”

NIOBE

“BEHOLD me what I am, behold!
And Leto look on her!
More beautiful, and crowned with gold
More copious than her hair.”

“Mother, though the sky keep blue,
The fields take on an ashen hue,
For terribly sudden and cold it blew,
The gust that seemed to answer you!”

“Behold my seven sons, behold
My daughters seven and fair!
More lovely these, and those more bold
Than Leto’s far-famed pair.”

“Mother, though sunshine cover you,
Your lips have trembled and changed hue,
Till, letting those ringing accents through,
They shook and we were shaken too!”

“Behold my husband’s bed, behold
Her god-dishonoured lair!
My births draw honest eyes like gold
From her ill-gotten pair.”

“Mother, I am stricken through!”
“And I, pain drags mine eyelids to!”
“They slay us, who our brothers slew
And god-like curled the lip at you!”

“Behold me what I am, behold!
And Leto, look on her!
My utter woe told and retold

Shall curse her cruel pair!"

I see thee, desolate, turned to stone
By gods who scorned thy pride,
Still weep from depths to them unknown,
Tears they dared not deride.

A CHORUS OF DORIDES

DEAD, dead, hale youth is dead,
Broken, bruised, broken, bathed in spray..
See, see, the hair, the wealth of his head,
With spoilt wreath-tendrils wed!
Limp as a dress once gay
Which on the shore is found
Where bathing, a child has drowned,
So floats he white as the spray;
So white Adonis lay
Before his whimpering hound;
So white on mid-sea lone
Rocked by the billows lay
Fallen Icarus.. Phaëton fallen,
Through flaming forest, prone,
Deaf to the wail at dawn,
To houseless nymph and fawn
Deaf where the leaves were ashes,
All lifeless, white; and so
Lay Hyacinth, his pillow
Tragic with purple splashes,
Deaf to left-handed Woe,
Where breezes through the willow
On beds of blue-bells blow...
Were these not kissed?.. not washed with tears?
Did any fond name at their ears
Fail to plead vainly?

Billow danced over billow
Confounding him with foam;
Too tardily thought came home
And showed us he lay slain
As, once, beneath the willow,
Dead Jacinth lay when, dumb with pain,
Apollo by his darling knelt...
We..he..had played with risk!

Oh! he had hurled the disk,
So like a mortal felt!
And we too, drowned in woe,
Knew then what none should know,
How headlong love can be so blind
No hate could prove less kind...
Has he been kissed? .. been washed with tears? ..
Has any fond name at his ears
Failed to plead vainly?

—Our sadness be thy glory,
Young man strewn on the surge!
Though never a god weep for thee
Memory shall adore thee,
Caverns prolong thy dirge!

—Troop in shore, troop in shore, bid sleeping
Earth dream our croon till every weeping
Echo, re-echo

“Dead, dead, poor short-lived lover,
Wasted, wrecked, wasted day by day!
Storm after storm will cover,
Roll thee, or drench with spray:
When piecemeal thy frail bones grow white,
Will aught in thy worn skull by night
Heed the wind crying?”

ECHOES FROM CIRCE'S HALL HARPIES EXULT

PALE sky, soft and blue;
Blackbirds cross it in a streak:
Dark flood, salt and blue;
Black ships founder, crash and shriek.
Out on the mortal cry!
Flushed when the spume flakes sting,
Sick of the summer sky,
Gods in the tempest sing.

STRANDED MARINERS CHANT

Let sailors have the best of fare,
Figs and cherries piled in domes,
Clotted curds and oozing combs,
Spluttering joints and roasts that swear!
Half-seas-over's not enough,
Sailors like their weather rough:
Come, kiss and pledge them topsy-turvy;
Manners always savour scurvy!

On shore a sailor can but drink!
Mock Charybdis in the bowl,
Till honey give the wine a soul!
Brim on silver brim now clink,
Loll we back and hold 'm high,
Tilt 'm up, and drain 'm dry;
As billow over billow pounds
Your sailor grapples and abounds!

ODYSSEUS DEPLORES

Dumb brutes, my heart aches to believe
That ye entomb
Talkers, with hearing to receive
Thought from their brothers!
That this fur smothers

Naked smile-crinkled face,
Drowns me in gloom;
Though now ye move with novel grace.

To see you thus succeed in being
Perfect and yet not human
With flashing tears, confounds my seeing,
As though I were a woman
Whose man so little proves the hero,
She counts it zero.

CIRCE ASPIRES

These brutes, adorable Sir,
Once wondered what they were;
Are answered now. So I but knew
What thine enigmatical soul may dare,
Mine inner vision should climb
To the zenith of potency and view
What yet may lurk in Time.

ODYSSEUS EXULTS

NOT was nor will be but what is,
With kiss the essence of our kiss
Absolves the absolute heart
Of debt. Though all lips part,
Once they so meet,
Is, and complete
Is the immense
Courageous sense
Of good as good.
This immaterial food
Of spirit is so grand
Though sea eat all the land,
Though ocean faint to air,
Though naught else stay where all things were,
Their value still were there.

PHANTOM SEA-BIRDS

SIRS, though ocean's gapless bound
Ever-same do gird us round,
With the East-wind at our back,
Ere the tilting blue turn black,
Fix the eye on glowing haze
Which the sun's late-lingered rays
Crimson like anemones
That butterflies in woodland kiss.
Though the prow duck to the dips,
And abrupt waves slap the ship's
Bellied bows whose timber thrills,
Look to see those unmoored hills,
Safe in ward of magic, steer,
Summer-sweet, o'er surges drear,
With the rambling palace, rich
Home of Circe, island-witch,
Daughter of the misled Sun,
Whom false Persa lured and won,
Long held fast and kissed and kissed,
Having couched her like a mist,
Where the salt, waste, marshy fens
Find sea-monsters brackish dens:
Helios lay there on the rushes
Which the booming storm-wind crushes..
Blushing gorgeously for shame
Lay for hours all the same.
Hark, perhaps a Siren sings!
Viewless talons, tail and wings,
Deadly, deadly now their charm
With no outward show of harm.
Listen, listen! back the ear
With the hollow hand, to hear.

"The air is alive, yet fear no ill;
Let the helm loose, and trust our skill;

Free the tugging sail with a jerk,
For we can do all manner of work.
Safe as a bubble on milk new drawn,
Drift like a curled moon before the dawn ..
Dreams that merge in a dream more vast,
Your lives shall merge in life at last,
Where death shall loom no more but frame the past,
As frames a park an open palace-door,
Where leaves blown in ne'er reach across the floor
To kings whose minds hark back, though their wounds
grow not sore.
Fear, there, seems childish passion, known no longer;
Each sense has leisure; memory, though stronger,
Yet veils what else might tempt the fond heart to de-
plore.
A queen shall fill the crystal up with wine,
To bathe your lips still smarting from the brine;
And you shall tread,
Bare-foot, on petals shed;
And you shall lie in jasmine-trellised bed,
Dream, meet with any friend alive or dead;
Obedient sleep,
Prolonged for rapture deep,
Shall let each soul her chosen comrade keep
And to the full in boon communion steep:
Turn once to hear,
True lips will brush your ear,
Our bodies in your arms be real and dear..
One whom you loved in vain at last drawn near.

Conjure with pain
That trance we would attain!
Wound the too passive bosom!—Violent not in vain,
O talons, let
A warm red rainfall wet
The unmoved faces, dew the stiff beard's jet!

Yea, deaths of love
Are often births thereof:
Lorn heart with freshened wing, like spray-drenched
dove
Whose pink feet dip
In the long wave's eager lip
While faintness numb invades each frail plume-tip,
Leaps to our arms;
We nurse and lull those qualms,
Yet ne'er have felt their all-transforming charms.
Our hearts were cold,
When first Love's tale was told
In our young ears .. now has the tale grown old,
His power unknown;
Sobbed sound and that alone,
Has mocked our ears: our hearts are still our own.
Those who praised him,
Knit with us limb in limb,
Died blind with joy while yet our eyes were dim:
Still would we try,
Before life's vigour dry,
With you to capture bliss, share bliss, and die.”

Turn, turn with a welling tear
And a pleasure-cozened ear:
See the huge black canvas bars
Half the fully-wakened stars,
While the tackle's tarry smell
Faintly from the hold doth tell.
Ah! the bleak mid-ocean plain,
Sad Persephone's cold field,
Heaves with no rich golden grain,
But salt tears and sleep its yield.
—Queen, now on these furrows rocked,
May our brains from dreams be locked!

THE HOME OF HELEN
LACEDAEMON, hast thou seen it?
Lacedaemon, Lacedaemon!
Round Taygetus the forests
Leaguer crags raised far above them!
Lacedaemon rich in corn-lands,
With the grand hill-shoulders round them
Blue as lapis in the twilight,
Striking early every morning
Through the mist till when the azure
Drops a veil of lucent sapphire
O'er our mountains in the noontide,
Our old ramparts, walls of safety!

And Eurotas, hast thou heard him,
Heard Eurotas, old Eurotas,
Gurgle, growl and gnaw the boulders?
Hast thou heard Eurotas laughing?
Hast thou stemmed his solemn current,
Where the dark rose-laurels shade it,
In the cool cliff-sheltered places,
Where the women bathe, while gravely
Swans sail in and out among them..
Swimming women, in pure water
Passing 'neath swans proud and passive,
Where Zeus saw and loved white Leda?

TO LEDA

IN MEMORY OF OSWALD SICKERT

WISELIEST confirmed of river bathers, thou,

Most nobly wooed of any god-loved queen,
That oft didst swimming, like a snow-white plough,
The swiftest crystal furrow, then didst lean,
A panting majesty, on willow arms
Which, yielding, cradled thee, while all thy charms
Lay, open-bloomed, beneath the eye of heaven;
Thus lapped serene, through many a summer even,
Consenting to the silence, thou wast seen..

Not only of white swans and cygnets gray,
Dove-coloured cygnets, swans of arching pride
That passed thee in abstraction; clouds of day
Sail azure as such birds o'er waters glide,
And clouds will no more pause near kings' fair homes,
Though queens watch at the casements while their combs
Gleam indolently drawn through perfumed tresses,
Than those swans loitered; tell me! had thy guesses
Soared trembling towards Olympus, wonder-eyed?

Frail through the empyrean hadst thou sent
Some fond surmise?

Or had conjecture, with mere swans content,
In fowler wise

Stolen on islet lone.

Girt with its bullrush zone?

Watched some proud mother warm her nest,
Or strike her tardy eggs?

Watched the soft cygnets quaintly test
Freedom on doubtful legs?

Watched, by an odd bright notion madly caught,
Stout babies break from shells,

And, hooded under fragile domes, make sport,
Like bees from flower bells?

Zeus whispers, where and whom thou canst not know;
(At his proposal how thy cheek would blanch !)
Mischievous Cypris hears with hers aglow;
Both gleeful watch thee on rose-laurel branch
Hang thy gold belt of weight to stoop pink blooms
Until they kiss themselves in water glooms,
Then, royal robes against the trunk suspended,
Loosen thy locks and vests; for these descended,
Thy beauty all the joy of light assumes.

Dupe of Olympian stratagem, thy flesh
Trembling for swan pursued by eagle, thou
Staggerest from thy bath while both birds thresh
The noon, the water, in thy wake... till now
Compassion, breeding courage, turns thee round...
Soon sheltering arms, his open haven, found
They held one to whom all must be conceded:
As eagle-Aphrodite passed unheeded
About thine that imperial neck was wound.

O beautiful white woman, that white bird
Embraced, ere long
Made rapturous music and was nobly stirred
To wondrous song;
Note surging through his throat
On modulated note..
Sounds unsealing worlds of bliss,
Dream-hallowed, sunset-flushed..
Sounds more melting than a kiss
Received on midnight hushed..
Sounds that made thee know, Troy must be burned,
Helen be loved and blamed;
Ay, distant, 'neath thy closed lids, were discerned
Those shriek-pulsed towers that flamed:

Yet never, never, if the pain waxed shrewd
(Though in a vaster pleasure wholly merged)
Would thy great lover let remorse intrude
Upon that bliss, that like an anguish surged
Beneath his ardour, as beneath the blast
Swoll'n ocean in tall waves runs high and fast;
Oh, never had a pale regret permission
To slow interpret to thy soul each vision
That flashed like summer lightning, flashed and past!

Forbidden loves are sweet to human hearts,
And, would but spare Necessity consent,
They might ennable; sanction she imparts
Was ne'er to any other woman lent:
Thy heart alone felt shame dissolve away
In pleasure limpid as the dawn of day;
Beauty, unhumbled by the cold next morning,
Rash impulse thou createdst brought adorning
And like a bridegroom wrapped thee from dismay:

Delicious down of pulsing throat and breast
Thine arms have known;
Thy fanned heart all the power of wings confessed,
Wings that had flown
Where thy dazed thoughts ne'er dared;
In bliss then thine, hath shared
Strength, that had churned the river white
Behind the mightiest swan;
Strength, that was sudden like the light
That reddens day-break wan;
Strength thou couldst no more question or forbid,
Than struggle of thine might check
When, round thy shoulders, through thy tresses, glid
That amorous god-like neck.

AGATHON TO LYSIS

A BEAUTIFUL bird on a beautiful dame
Begat sweet Helen of Troy:
Who, cloud-like over Idalia, came
To fondle thy mother, boy?
As in dream conceived, like a vision, thou
Approachest as might bosomed prow,
Of leisured water-farer
On summer-long voyage. Thy wrist.. thy hand..
Mere nothings in their movement can command
Pictures through the jubilant mind to flow
Each yielding place unto one rarer:
Now throbs throughout a god-invaded throat
Truth's unutterable note;
Then plumage, like a governed storm of snow,
Downsettles or uprises as in thee
Zest leaps or indignation calms. I see,
Cooped whole within thine iris, too,
The vaulted vast abounding blue.
Thy voice though musical, ever fails
Ineloquent, yearning like a bird's;
Our laboured language naught avails;
For some infused Olympian strain,
First makes thee glow, then pale again
With thought too choice for words.

SUGGESTED BY THE REPRESENTATION
ON A GRECIAN AMPHORA OF A WINGED
AND ADOLESCENT EROS SEEKING TO
CATCH A HARE IN A SCARF

WHIRR! and the dread wings flap;

Scamper! the rabbit flies

Down the branched lanes like a streak!

Eyes he but the prickly hoops,

In covert furze some tunnelled gap,

He hears those pinions flap

As they poise that trenchant beak;

In his heart the venture dies,

And headlong on he flies..

Bolts, and the buzzard swoops,

Checks, and those dark wings flap.

Swift in the liquid light,

Steering between the furze,

Down the rough and hummocked slopes,

Skirting briery clumps of fern,

Brown and red-brown and jetty bright,

With dire reserve of might

Tracking those panic hopes,

Forward the buzzard skirrs,

Intently threads the furze,

Veers with the rabbit's turn,

Dogs, and keeps close astern,

Cheered by that reckless flight.

Love, on like wings, in chase

Held a like timid harmless prey;

Young, in his teens, with beardless face,

His body lithe, direct and slant

And smooth as the glossy rich display

On arrowy buzzard's form; but Love,

Sailing the open down above

The tall-eared leveret all apart,
Sought not with talon or with beak
To strike, but in a scarf did seek
To trap his timid quarry;
And after helter-skelter race,
In victory did close the chase,
And caught his panting quarry.

Not as when plunged beak joys,
Eyeless the rabbit bleeds,
While his quivering ends in death;
When detaches here and there
The handsome bird a morsel choice;
When a strange proud noise
Making, at times he heeds
The distance, where the breath
Of August stirs the heath;
Dreams, and is keen and fair,
And as that desert air
Seems staidly to rejoice:

Love with soft silk doth blind
His prey, and thus transports
Far to hutch of white pine wood
Closed by latch of orichalc,
A hutch where he shall to his mind
Straw, oats, and parseley find
And gaze o'er temple courts
Round which doves coo and brood,
Where in their tender mood
White-handed Graces walk,
Pause, stroke his fur and talk
To him with voices kind.

—Soul, thou art caught by Love
After such chase, such pangs; so blind

With darkness round, beneath, above,
Transported to like quiet shrine,
Which far more wondrous thou shalt find
Than freedom's rugged wilderness.
There thou may'st watch in dainty dress
Virtues and Graces that combine,
Not only with soft-sounding word,
But converse understood when heard,
To raise thee up to glory;
And, if thou follow as they lead,
Their patience will ere long indeed
Have raised thee nigh to glory.

Taught are the wild and free,
The warren is their school;
Hazard, fate, the hawk, mishap
Teach them, bringing home the truth;
Death at their doors they daily see,
They learn or cease to be:
Such as do never nap
Grow old and strong and rule:
They dub who is caught a fool,
Age and forget their youth,
Hold, though with scanty proof,
Their life the best that may be.

—Love, and they see thee too!
Flee from thee, crouch or hide!
Beauty, youth and power and joy,
Golden curls that please the winds,
Naked perfection, wings that outdo
In power the kite's, in hue
The Halcyon's! Their minds
Are Fear's, not theirs—they hide
From eyes, in which to confide
Meaneth life shall be joy!

They see thee, half man, half boy,
Unbewitched they thy beauty view!

Thy house they have never seen:
Its covered courts are paved with tiles,
The open ones with grass are green;
While, indoor waters' channell'd speech
The music-loving ear beguiles.
Psyche, thy bride, thy sisters three,
The Graces and that mother of thee,
Beauty divine.. these all and each,
With the seven, kirtled Virtues, tell
(Holding the rapt soul in a spell)
Thy captives many a story
Of great example and great grace..
Of lovers, who all fear did face,
And died, but live in story.

THE FOUNT TO PAUL VALERY

The Speaker, an Athenian nympholept, formerly prospector of mines, has entered mendicant to a group of friends gathered under the portico of a country house in Attica, (about B.C. 400).

H A! night feels cooler in this porch...
Surely, thunder mumbles threats
To drown us soon?... Drawn t'ward your torch,
Let me of my crowd of debts
A last contract for sheltered rest...
Well, grant this tattered garb, at best
Courtesy could just believe,
Had once of cloth ye wear been rival;
Yet my tongue's trick is a survival
Merits trust... Have I your leave?

I, oversea, once roved the Greater Greece,
With Pythagoras would sup,
Imbibing fluent wisdom's peace
Till his silence brimmed the cup
Long empty, which he mute then raised
To Night, whom never ode has praised
Grandly as that gesture did!
Later, bemazed 'mid Thracian ranges,
I thrilled one noon as when flute changes
Back to tune deep years have hid...

Lo, mood of his surged through mine own,
Smiled and drew divineness close!
Tokens as to girl's lover blown
Breathed around like balm from rose!
Mine stood where had his feet, I felt,
Arboured in music, he had knelt
Awed to goddess. Thought, as when
Beyond cloud mainland ship sails under,
Men view clear sky ahead and ponder
Home or courtship, moved me then.

A river from beneath sheer crag
Welled full-grown and shook a fierce
Sheet, as when wrestles with a flag
Hurricane and stuns our ears.
This tumbling chaos t'ward me seethed,
Neared, and in polished heavings wreathed
Gorge's widest topmost trough;
From the climb swinked and faint, I tingled
While lo! mine with his psyche mingled ..
Found at last when farthest off !

“As Dawn refinds hills lost in night,
Torpid, slumber-logged, have I
Groped back where things are ordered right
As in memory they lie;”
My lips crooned. “Icy fervour toils
Under these vaulting waves, so boils
Near volcano cone hot lake...

—Thou, breast-high on cliff-carven mountain,
Emergest from Earth's womb, O Fountain,
As from nightmare god might wake!

“Thy lucid ardour quaffs the sun,
Soul of Beryl, Laughing Heart,
Resourceful as a nymph to run
Over, round, and in good part
Take boulder’s hindrance; deftly soothe,
Caress, and with long patience smooth
Stubborn rudeness; yet more wise
To muse and in wide shoal reflect
Both frond and tree, and recollect
Azure frank as infant eyes.

“I stoop, and lo! am pictured there
Thoughtful, yet deterred from thought
Of self-observance too aware.
—Vivid Likeness, idly caught,
With eyes intent to follow mine,
Thou canst not feel gaze probing thine.
—Mouth, proposing words for sound,
Thou movest mute, and I am speaking
To face that is not even seeking
For the friend I ne’er have found.

“Not that these rapids lack a voice!
Drone and echo drowse the ear.
Ah, lurks no passion in their noise?
Naiad’s chant that Faun could hear?
Some covert neighbour of my pulse
Whom this dull deafness must convulse?
—Pardon! grant me yet a hope,
O haunting Daughter of the Muses,
Whose range of melody refuses
Me thy drift in phrase and trope!

“Were I indeed Pythagoras,
Mused now wholly as he thinks,
Thy music through this ear would pass;
Then, as drooping pansy drinks,
This face would lift and wing a smile
To capture thine, bound to beguile
Thee of wisdom which we crave:
And, like three birds the ocean daring,
Our blithe hopes, soon, abreast, were faring
For a land far over wave.”

“Thou Truant, finder of mine eyrie
Which abrupt peaks bleak and dumb
Secure from sensual enquiry,
Till mine eager mind become
Lithe as, with whip-like sinewy dints,
Are rapids that enhance all tints
Shores to greet them fling, conform
To every bank, for rocks dividing,
Yet, through thy conscious image gliding
Red with blushes, grow not warm.

“Thus from the phantom future posts
Time, whose current wide as space is,
To that dim *Once was*, main of ghosts:
Stars, he showed me young like faces,
Have, wearied of themselves, drawn back
And, yielding to the invasive black,
Like a love forgotten, died.
Now only lives: there is no seeing
A dead man smile; not yet have being
Kisses babe shall give its bride.

“The Present weds with Change, and at
Beauty’s lip Joy sips, not drinks:
—Nectar!—O yes, and after that
Hope returns, or Rapture sinks
And drowns beneath content which cools:
Yet, where the tireless effort rules,
Mutual ardencies secure
Full comprehension, and delighted
Participation in requited
Truth’s accord that can endure.

“Even as torrent hence doth wind
Through exacting thought I wend:
Far regions prove this river kind,
Meekly I conceive, then tend
The children of that journey’s pain:
Labour, whose grief matures to gain,
Recreates all I perceive,
Assiduous till rude fact discover
Value for which my soul, like lover,
Wills to give till she receive.”

“Bless thou mine eyes, O Voice divine,
Winged to set the sky a-swim
As though thy notes intense like wine
Round this urn which summits rim
Were stirred to mix a draught for me
Who stagger hearing! Vision be!
Stay this whirl with form revealed!
Complexion, mien, to wed thy thinking!
For had both eye and ear been drinking
Worship-calmed my heart had kneeled.”

“What wouldst thou look on more than this,
Air and sunshine cupped in rocks,
And water like abounding bliss?
Wouldst thou eddies turn to locks
A-dance o'er shoulder, bosom, loin
Of nymph whose limbs with thine might join
Untransformed, transforming true
Aspiring hopes to satiate senses,
As iridescent mist condenses
To a cloud that blots the blue?”

“O Chantress, wear the sky for hood;
Yet remember blood is wild,
Not tethered to a pensive mood,
But impulsive like a child.”

“We are not what we may have been
Nor all we shall be; as we lean
Skiff-like is our essence steered
Towards our hope or our disaster.”
“In thine my craft adores a master:
I like vane by thee am veered.”

“Dear mortal, now I thrill through thee!
Thine and mine have come to poise;
Yea, interpenetrated, we
Tune to wonder, merge in joys
That brim with each the fellow-soul!
So full-moon's image fills rock-bowl!
Light so rides in chariot-cloud!
All one aroma zephyr's motion
Lives so and dies! so must devotion
Be by shining eyes avowed,

“And quicken mind as hand a glove,
Till, as ripeness roundeth grape,
Survey expand and dome above
Thinker and his dwarfish shape,
While, plastic to the marvel viewed,
His youth and patience are renewed.”
Vigour flamed without, within!
Meseemed I choir became and vision,
Yet found self next as in derision,
Drowsy with the torrent’s din.

I slept awhile, then woke revived,
Full of wings and busy power;
For in my mind like bees had hived
All her words, which any hour
Will fetch me honey, brew me mead
That voyagers from my guidance freed,
Interpermeated, we
Explore those bounteous virgin rivers,
Where toil and candour are the givers
Of recurrent ecstasy.

Dead is Pythagoras, and I
Ebb by inches, rust with age.
If now no voices haunt the sky,
Deafness has been folly’s wage...
Mine ears are cankered... Waste of words!
Though your lips like the wings of birds
Flutter, they like fledglings fail...
What! are ye nobler than I thought you?
So with her lilt mine echo caught you...
Wine! and good!—Hosts all, all hail!

TO APHRODITE

O CANDID Smile dimple the sea!
Thy boons are all apportioned ill;
Whimful, endowing whom it will,
Thy right hand tossed forth hope to me,
Tireless devotion and a mind
Like a bee's cavern honey-lined,
Dripping with joyous thought... Ah, true!
Yet o'er my face thy left hand drew
Confusion, stung each shapeless lip
That every word thereon might trip,
And lodged within a ploughman's tongue,
Laughing "This fool would die to please;
What matter how his heart be wrung?
His pangful hours we thus beguile
Of lilts that glint like April seas."
So my best rival with thy smile,
Twit me, foam-pillowed at thine ease!

THE SONG OF CHIRON

UNDER the mountain lawn

Are caverns, yea, there are many
On no cliff face that yawn,
Nor may be reached by any
Fissure, or crevice, or chink
Through which the stoat might slink,
Or winter-dreading snake
His way to their vastness make.

Lakes in those rock-halls sleep,
Huge cisterns, water lanes,
Pure in black darkness and deep,
The storage of old rains ;
In corridor, aisle, and transept
As pure and as long have slept
Vast volumes of the night air,
For wind was never there.

Beautiful on the lawn
The hooves of the centaur sound,
Thrilling the peaceful dawn,
And echoing underground :
But maddening, grander, divine
Music, though unenjoyed,
Must float over tarns of the mine,
Which heard would enkindle a bliss
Excelling that on silence buoyed,
When, mute as my worship is,
Round a dome that has all things spanned
The stars unnumbered stand.

I am the centaur, who knows
The beauty of hooves is sound ;
And not like the horse that goes
Unenraptured over the ground.

The wisest of men I track,
And take them upon my back;
Pitying their steps so weak,
But entranced to hear them speak.

They say the adventurous mind,
Where thought has yet no roads,
Holds there are yet to find
Vast and divine abodes
In the central secret soul,
Where purpose and grace do roll
Like music tombed in the lawn,
When I gallop for joy at dawn;
Like silence of stars by night,
When their beauty exerts her might.

ALCESTIS SPEAKS

“O GLAD Devotion flushing up the sky,
Dawn brighter than a child’s best mornings are,
Art seen, yet deemed for human strength too far?
We, prone to view an end, of Hope too shy,
Too diffident, await Fate’s casting die
Much as Fear waits. Westward speeds every star;
Some, which set quick upon the sun, there are
Drop into it; those glory, so may I.
Love should not barter like coarse traffickers
Nor buy with abnegation any store
Of helps... Did not my children thank me for
The rising moon not mine to give nor theirs?..
Let me, a child, own gifts in everything;
Like them blow kisses to the birds that sing.”

IS SPOKEN OF

She then became a shade that he might live,
Now is what she had been... We contemplate
One who gave all, who, reckless chose for mate,
Not him who lacked whatever she might give,
Nor Time-to-Come distraught with echoing names,
Nor dim and dusty Death... her all was given
To that which in each heart is the true heaven,
A spirit victor over all men’s shames.
Yes, rather cease to be than be so vile
As peer close at a balanced less or more;
Beauty pays not for admiration, nor
Is bounty taxed for every kindling smile;
Their worth is not like truth about this earth
But knows no measure, neither death nor birth.

BLIND THAMYRIS

NOTE

I hope to persuade any who think the inclusion of this prose narrative among my poems needs explanation, that forms can only have felicity in particular cases and therefore that none has aesthetic propriety for a general purpose. Grand poetry exists in prose and dreary folly in impeccable verse. Then no case should be prejudged.

SINCE my father was a hero and my mother a goddess of the woods, I was sent when twelve years old to the cave of Chiron, that he might instruct me in wisdom and valour. This life, divorced from all female tenderness, appealed to my pride, and only at night were my eyes ever moistened with regret. I was now free to follow a stream until, too weary to advance further, some cradle of scented herbs would lure me to rest and doze. At length twilight brought me an energy, winged with dread of the dusking forests, that carried me right home to the cavern. The sources were always my goal, the more easy descent seawards never tempted my morning moods: and, as he taught me the lyre or the control of my voice, Chiron remarked a similar preference for those words and cadences that lead the spirit away from the high-roads of thought and feeling. Surely emotions well up in the fastnesses of tranquillity, close under the blue and white of heaven, more virginal than can be experienced in lowland retreats? As time wore on, Chiron, the daily lesson being ended, would speak to me of a rhapsodist, former pupil and great favourite of his. "Agenor," he began, "like thyself, Thamyris was ever striving to reach the summits before joint and sinew were sufficiently tough. Alas, though he has often brought back with him the rarest strophes and melodies, men have refused to listen to them. They prefer a music that better harmonises with their garish sea-board towns, and he wanders shrouded in an ever deeper gloom." With a sigh he paused; and I waited, expecting to be warned not thus to estrange myself from humanity by persistently climbing among the hills. But he seemed unable so to conclude; and presently bid me run away and practise throwing the spear.

One forenoon when wind, so strong as to seem foreign to the settled brilliance of the weather, was bowing

the fir trees, and now here, now there, their backs arch-ed silverly, flashing like waves on the dark green ridges, while the sound was that of a chorus of Titans rejoicing in violence (so much so that we had to retreat well back within the cave before we could hear ourselves play or sing), Chiron broke off the lesson, still dis-turbed it may be by the hurly-burly without, though it strained but faintly through the stillness held under that roof of rock. He sat gazing forth into the sunny turbulence, so grandly though jaggedly framed; and I, leaning back against his flank, watched his moved vis-age worn with much living. Then for the first time he began to recite me actual words of Thamyris, recalling how their public delivery had proved that those who thronged round the other rhapsodists would never collect about him.

“Untouched white cloud,
Like a task acclaimed
When the heart is young,
Thou fliest higher
Than the eagle deed
That is praised by men.

Unheeded silence,
In the night or at noon,
Thou singest to the hilltops
A song that is richer
Than the tales of war
Which men crowd to hear.

Magnificent joys
Lie about like garments
Amazingly broidered;
A god has discarded them
Before launching upward
In naked loneliness.

But no human hand
Lifts a single tunic;
No man's heart prefigures
The deep satisfaction
Of moving vested
In the pictured raiment
That a god walked the earth in."

Chiron was silent; and I dreamed of finding and putting on the slough of Apollo. I saw myself in a sultry glare climbing boulders with grey lichen-crusted cheeks and dark moss-bearded cavities down which I peered in hopes of finding a cupful of collected dew. At last I arrived on the crest: and there, at the bottom of a crater of wild tumbled blocks, lay gleaming somewhat silver and violet and blue. I scrambled down: a pattern of scaled serpents was looped inextricably all over white samite. I lifted this, and from the inside there slipped with a swish a body-vest of pale vermillion rippled with gold in a device of arrows, each drawn to the head in a sturdy bow; an armoury of the proper size for an host of mice had it been real instead of pictured. I gasped; and Chiron's eyes met mine, so that I blushed all down my neck.

Months later, on my return at dusk from a day's ramble, I learned from our new pupil, the little Achilles, that Chiron had been fetched away by two other centaurs, and expected to be absent all night, perhaps longer. We prepared and ate our supper of chestnuts, boiled and then mashed in milk, and were shortly rolled in separate bears' skins to sleep. Achilles, who was but just turned six, was soon off; but I lay hour after hour forecasting coming events with eyes wide open. I cannot now revive those dreamy adventures, and only recollect that Thamyris figured in no few; and how fevered I was by the thought that much sadness and dis-

appointment lay in wait for me, so mysteriously like him. At last moonlight began to edge into the cave; travelling along the wall it soon lit up a trophy, the skull and huge hooped horns of an ibex; and next the rug made of four chamois hides that Chiron hangs over his flanks and crupper in winter, when round his bust he wraps thick folds of brown knitted wool; not long after it was bathing the ebony lyre inlaid with polished iridescent sea-shell that has both its fluted pillars and their screw-heads enamelled with lines of scarlet. This wonder Jason had brought back from Colchis and sent up by an embassy to Chiron. I rose, and stealing softly to it looked up, not at the well-loved colours of the lyre but towards the tranquil effulgence that had woken them out of the darkness, and was surprised to see that there were many swift-travelling clouds in the sky: for while I lay in the shelter the night had seemed quite still. At that moment the moon was covered, and the cave became so dark that I stepped outside and saw the moonlight fast growing again on the lawn lower down, where we throw the spear and wrestling matches take place. I hurried to meet it and, once there, the terror and attraction of the hills at night shook me; for was I not brought forth by the regent of a bosky grove? Though its sacred safety rustled leagues from where I stood, might I not brave those mountain forests, being able so to account for my hardihood? I was carried away, neither walking nor running, but at a sort of shaken trot that seemed dictated by the thudding of my heart. The almost level path wound along our valley high above the torrent, which it would meet and cross some two miles deeper in this fold under Pelion. My limbs moved as it were unbidden; once or twice I stopped and said "This is a dream," till the indescribable reality of everything drove me on. My teeth were frequently jolted, yet the cold did not seem intense

enough to chatter them: and surely I was not abjectly frightened? This notion roused my self-control and calmed me till I slipped along like a peaceful thought, unchallenged yet alert. The stream was crossed by the fallen fir-trunk, and the path returned eastward on the opposite side of the valley till the distant mouth of the cave was passed and the forefront of this new ridge won. Where the view is immense, embracing islands in the sea and snowy Olympus and the unnumbered chains of the mountainous coast. Here I squatted on the short fine turf and folded both arms across my knees as a cushion for my chin. Perhaps I dozed, for my head was heavy when I lifted it to make sure of a sound..the trampling of centaurs a great way off.

“They are returning” I said to myself..and laid an ear against the earth, and then peered into the darkness, for the moon lit nothing now except one band of sea far out behind the islands. All but certain by which track they were coming, I plunged headlong downward through the brushwood as though it had been broad day, intending to cut their road on the moor above the cliffs. How many times I floundered into bushes or barked a shin against bough or boulder, those who have done such things may imagine. I at last stumbled out on the heather hundreds of feet beneath, limping but consoled to fancy my troubles ended. Before I had cleared a thousand yards I fell, wricking my ankle, and rose with difficulty: for an agony like death whenever my foot pressed the ground routed the very notion of an inexhaustible endurance latent within me. I fell again on to the thick springy couch of scented ling and soon felt deliciously relieved. Violent activity had chased the last vestige of night-terror, and the wind roving round me made even that barren place homelike as with the movements of a familiar presence. The slightest jerk to my right foot, and immediately h

my brow was beaded with sweat; for pain like a savage dog held my ankle in its jaws, and would grind them again if I stirred. Hooves thundered nearer and nearer; the noise so invaded my consciousness that to cry for help seemed as useless as to halloo against tempestuous breakers on a rocky shore, yet simultaneously there returned on me all that Chiron had taught of the diverse tribes of sound.. how some are irreconcilable while others easily agree, how the loudest of one family may fail to drown small ones of distinct origin, and in a continuous and familiar uproar their different calibre may startle even as in silence. Fed by these memories hope grew strong, and I cried out "Father Chiron, Father Chiron, I am here and must die if you do not come." Then I listened: all was still. At first I feared they had reached the hills and entered the valley so that the sound of their trampling was walled off. Just then it began again slowly and unexpectedly near, so I shouted "Father Chiron, do not leave me to the wolves!" Then his voice answered, and tears streamed over my face and sobs so shook me that I could not make out his words: yet between the spasms I gasped "This way, this way!" And he came and knelt beside me, first on his fore-knees, then settling down on his haunches gradually so as not to scare me by the blundering of his fetlocks. His large gentle hand felt my moist burning brow while I pointed at my helpless ankle: then he lifted it between thumb and finger and with the index of the other hand began to stroke the swelling thoughtfully. Then lifting his head he shouted, "Rhœtus, find me some sorrel or lettuce; and if you see any straight wands cut me one or two. Catch! here is my knife," and he slipped the thong by which it hung over his head. Now I must tell you it was a delicately smithied blade with both edges sharp, and lived, point foremost, in a snug trough cut along the yellow boxwood handle over

which a lid of box was spliced, the open end being secured by a wedge of ebony attached by a thong. For use, the blade was first shaken out on the palm, then its heft-end replaced and secured by tapping the wedge with a stone. It was our great pleasure to borrow this knife and scratch lions or eagles upon a horn, or out of soft pine carve straight-robed Athena with casque and spear. I know every cut that defines her attitude, but can never give her features, either terrible or beautiful. But Chiron was repeating to me "Did not Achilles tell you that I could not be back before morning?" for my mind had suddenly wandered to my foster-mother's farm kitchen in the lowlands forty miles away. "Yes, he told me; but I could not sleep and at last I wanted to explore the woods by moonlight: after I heard you coming, in running I caught my foot in the twisted trunks of this heather." With a low husky chuckle he said "Though I am supposed to be really wise, the simplicity of your story rebukes me for sinister forebodings." I had no inkling then how he dreaded lest the violence of centaur-herds and the knavery of townsmen, like clashing flints, should cause a conflagration. For ever more pressingly he forebodes the violation of his cavern's peace, the only spot left where men and centaurs foregather kindly. At that time I attributed his words to the ocean of his wisdom, which, like a shore-bred child, I was accustomed to hear murmur, content if now and again the beauty of a thought meant for me stranded like a dainty shell at my feet. Hitherto I had lain like one bed-rid, haunted by the seriousness of that pain; but now, sitting up, I dared to show a curiosity which every endeavour would have suppressed had my right ankle been as sound as the left, and asked "Where have you been, Father Chiron?" His husky laugh allowed the indulgence I had claimed, and his voice grew strained as he answered "I was called

to the death-bed of my best-beloved son Thamyris." "Is he very sick?" I asked. "Not now, for he moaned me his last epode and ended like the swan." At that I lay back once more and looked across the heather at the moon, unwilling to embarrass his sorrow by staring at it. And after a pause Chiron in a very low voice began to croon:

Falcon-daughters of Apollo
Ye spur on a man to sing,
Rend with pangs sharp as a sword:
Then for his best award
Faint praise and a broken wing.

Is it for larks to follow
The snow-feathered cloud?
They are dusky and hot and fragile
And scarcely contain a proud
Insanely throbbing heart:
Ye are amber-eyed, sleek and agile
Taloned and savagely smart.

When the fierce blood bursts our pulses,
Darkened like Hades at noon
There falls from the towering ether
A mangled mass of feather.

An end to the pain that convulses
Life with ambition is boon
Enough for a soul uplifted,
And by each of you severally gifted.

When silence had nursed the memory of this for a space I glanced at Chiron: his wet eyes stared steadily at the moon. He roused himself and began to shout to hasten Rhœtus, and the young centaur soon approached, bounding wildly, a mat of tresses flapping like a black flag about his head. Chiron took the knife,

the leaves and the two sallows, and measuring these last against my leg cut two wands from their stouter ends, split them and placed their flat sides against the leaves in which he packed my tender joint. He next cut strands from under his white beard as long as his arm: with one he bound the splints lightly round my calf and with the other secured them beneath my foot. Rising, he helped me up, and warned me not to put any weight on the cage which lengthened and imprisoned my leg. Rhœtus then at a sign lifted me on to our master's back, and, side by side, they began walking across the heath; the sky was once more clear and the moon was setting. The sea, although it could be heard, was hidden by the heathery hillocks which thatched its cliffs, as Olympus and the great ranges were, behind hills tawny and russet with beech and alder, but hooded in ever-green firs that towered dead black in the moonlight. A whistle sounded: and there was Caudon waiting three hundred paces off. Rhœtus hurried forward, crying to him "It is my turn now," but his piebald fellow immediately shouldered some heavy burden and set off at a gallop. "What is it?" I said to Chiron, round whose vast waist my arms clung. "They shame our breed" he replied. "Ghosts of the dead never haunt centaurs; so for them the lifeless body is no more than an empty smock. Men are born with older fears and cradled in whispering awe. Reverence is thus taught them, first by terror, and then by esteem, if they consort with finely tempered minds. But these rough colts, deprived of the first, scarce heed the second lesson yet. — Poor Thamyris! the fair course of thy days was driven about till, willy-nilly, it clashed with the coarse-grained crowd: and must thy body be tossed, fought for and whirled away in the fury of this boisterous rivalry?" They were fetching wide curves across the heath; sometimes even Caudon's piebald flanks were lost in

the darkness, and they became a mere chivy of distancing sounds : then again both toiled on the skyline above the cliffs, like shadows on a wall. Their shouts had at first betokened no more than horse-play, but took now an angrier accent. Chiron smartened his pace and I felt that his spirit was chafing : and when they next drew within earshot, he shouted commands that they were not so unbridled as to flout, but came severally, muttering, heated and resentful towards us. The old centaur reproached them for thus jolting the body of his friend. "But he feels nothing," argued Caudon.—"Well, well, had he been a skin of choicewine, you should have carried him with more care."—"Wine can be spoilt with shaking .. but a corpse!" grumbled Rhœtus. "Still for all he once was ..."—"Why, he was so mad as to put out his own eyes!" grunted Caudon, and Rhœtus continued "They say he died because he refused to eat in a rage that outlasted his life."—"Yet I, who am old enough to be your sire's grandsire, have often wished the hour stayed when his fingers wandered the strings."—"Years ago!" they interjected.— "Last evening he kissed my hands and taught me words that fly straight to the heart." Neither colt retorted, and the silence seemed so consecrated to the gravity of the wise Chiron's sorrow that I feared to break it, though devoured with curiosity about this unaccountable madness, blindness, and death. We had entered the valley and were climbing at a foot-pace among the trees. Though the moon had set, the sky had not darkened but greyed with the dawn. As the light increased the body absorbed my attention ; it hung wrapped in a coarse and torn cloak over Rhœtus' shoulder ; for Caudon had ceded it to him soon after they left arguing with Chiron. The arms dangled along his muscular back and the dead hands flopped and turned upon the glossy black hide to which his brown skin gave place

below the loins. They went a little in advance of us, and at times I could divine just how the head hung, by some yellow hair that appeared and disappeared behind a rent in the cloak, which swaying, opened and closed like the ill-hinged door of a granary loft that, swinging in the wind, shows the gleam of golden grain to a mid-winter day. My head had dropped in a doze, before we reached the place where a path branches down to the bathing pool: and Chiron bade Rhœtus and Caudon carry the body up to the cave, build a fire, and seethe meat, for all would be more than common hungry. But me he carried down to the large pool that spreads out from the foot of a fall in the torrent; and at the outer brim of this basin, where the clear water becomes shallow and escapes in many minor cascades downwards, he chose a bank of sward and laid me gently down where the water would flow over my damaged foot.

While I lounged at ease he himself gravely walked down under the pool; the water rose above the horse and only the man remained: still he trod carefully deeper, the white stones being often slippery with green weed; and now his beard and hair were floating like foam about his shoulders, as though a smaller column of invisible water were drilling the quivering surface right out in front of the torrent that thundered into boiling suds at the foot of the dripping rocks. Still his hooves felt their way down, till the billowy outward curves were sweeping right over his head. The white limestone lit up the depths and rendered his figure clearly visible though it seemed strangely stunted: his chestnut crupper, silvered as it was with age, became violet from contrast with the icy blue water. All around thinned boughs hung out long yellow leaves, and the reflections of some of them flickered like fish about him. Time seemed to have ceased, and necessities to be tempered in favour of this magnificently weathered

creature, that he might become divinely amphibious and death stand disarmed before him. Far above, a level shaft of sunlight from over the mountain shoulder suddenly caught the tree-tops. A naked scaffold of dark trunk, bough, and intricately forking branch sustained each thin tower-like tent of brilliant leaves. Thus, their grand swelling shapes hollow instead of dense with foliage, tanned or yellow instead of green, these chestnuts whose flaunting camps reach far up the valleys made a last stand against the disenchanting season of storms. The banks beneath were thick with fallen leaves interspersed with clusters of nuts like hedgehogs. The whole vividly coloured scene swam in the limpid transparent slumber which tuned my breathing though it had not closed my eyes. I thought "He will stay under too long and I shall never hear how poor Thamyris went mad," yet it seemed acceptable or at least necessary that I should never hear and that he should remain immersed for ever. No: he lifted his head and parted his hair and rubbed his eyes, and came up as slowly and solemnly out of the pool as he had descended into it. Streaming and refreshed he cantered round its shallow brim, splashing with his hooves; he shook and wrung from hair and beard streamers of diamond drops, quivering the while the glossy coat of his nether body to free its shaggy skirts, and whisking his tail against his hocks. Pausing beside me he smiled into my sleepy eyes and said "How goes the ankle?" I murmured that it was so cold as to have stopped aching and I could not now feel whether it were there or not. He drew me a little higher up till my bandaged foot was out of the numbing flow. Roused by this I could no longer refrain from asking what had driven poor Thamyris mad; and the answer came, soothing the terror that it stirred in my soul by the grave compassion with which it was uttered. "Less and less could

he endure to watch those whose attention his chant had failed to capture, grouped about some common rhapsodist who, with shouts, recounted how one man killed another in some freebooting foray. He must have wandered unwanted and uninspired for months before at last he stood near the ships where fishermen had been chipping holes in large flints in order to thread them along the bottom of their great sweep-net. These had often split before they were pierced, and fragments with knife-like edges lay all about. Suddenly dashing down his lyre, he stooped, and seized two sharp pieces; and sobbing out that his eyes should never again watch a crowd like that gaping upon the wharf at this bawler, he jabbed at his eyes. Others told me how they heard him, and turned to see blood streaming from his face and beard and from the two red hands that he waved as he staggered, unaccustomed to darkness. They thought some goddess in the shape of a sea-hawk must have struck him with her beak, and vanished as swiftly as she had come through the twilight. Afterward, when his broken lyre was found, they concluded that the Muses had sent her because he, though a mere mortal, sang such songs as might in the halls of Olympus be preferred to their own; for only among the gods, as those fishermen fancied, could he have found suitable audience. They led him to the temple of Apollo: there the priest killed a snake and bound its body across his bleeding orbits, and the wounds healed but sight did not return. Afterwards when he felt how he never knew where he was or who was near (when no one could lead him far towards the stony peaks he loved, for dread always overtook them at the danger of steep places for a blind man whose daimon left him totally unwarmed) he refused food and sat all day on the temple steps, and never begged an alms or stooped to gather what was thrown him. At night the hierodules had

sometimes heard him mutter as though he prayed for vengeance. They even believed that he had challenged the nine Muses to a trial of skill, offering to yield body and mind to their displeasure if he failed, but should he out-sing them, then each of them was to submit her body to bear him a child. For servile minds, Agenor, ascribe the motives familiar to themselves to those whose outstanding actions they must perforce canvass. Thus he endured not only perpetual darkness, but companionless solitude where streams of men were constantly passing; hearing voices but not one conversable. Then when death first warned him, he sent a message to me; this was delivered to Rhœtus and Caudon, who bore it upon the shoulders of Pelion."

And gazing round he continued "In this spot shall he rest, screened by these chestnuts from the cruel noons of summer: here shall a grave be dug. The distance from the cave is convenient, and bathers may often consent to remain while I re-chant one of his lays, till, departing, they breathe a pious wish for the peace of him whose life was full of strife and storms, though he never joined in battle, or trod the planks of a ship. When I stood by his side he said 'O god-like beast, no other ears ever listened to me with pleasure as thine did. Thou hast been rewarded with extended life, for thy actions and customs are swayed neither by fear nor by greed; but in the eyes of the young and in quiet haunts thou hast sought the wisdom most easily wed to divine melodies. Thou wilt understand and perhaps pity these strophes born of my anguish.' His fevered reveries would seem so to have exalted me that he used an address such as gods expect, and with the same trance-like utterance feebly and slowly delivered the hymn I repeated to you on the heath; but then the end came. Now you had better lie here for to-day lest you should jar that ankle, and I will send Achilles to you

with some meat." I wondered over all I had heard, not without dread of a similar fate, till Achilles came and wanted to know what I had seen in the night, whether nymphs or daimons or Artemis herself. As I ate the warm meat or broke the brown crusts between sips of wine, I told him. Then with all the roguish effrontery of his beauty, shaking his long yellow curls, he laughed "I should have done as you did for all the rest, Agenor, but I should not have sprained my ankle," and he danced off singing "No, indeed, indeed no!" while I, dropping the drained horn into the empty maple bowl, rolled over and slept.

When I woke the sun had passed the meridian, and the sound of a spade and the thud of falling clods could be heard, and looking across I saw Caudon working in a grave on a crest of the opposite bank; soon the blade rang on the rock, and his action became that of shovelling out the loam. Next, Chiron and Rhœtus arrived, carrying the body between them wound in a long and splendid pall. This had been sent by Thetis as a present with Achilles when he joined us in July. It measured six yards by four, and might have served for a temple curtain or to drape a royal bed. The goddess herself had worked it far out under the sea, aided by the silver-shoed daughters of Doris. Flying over a ground of deep blue were seen harpies with black wings spread and every feather tipped with white, their brown bodies shaped like large eggs; they wore coral necklaces, and had the heads of women with singing mouths and long streaming raven curls. Yet they were armless and had the legs and talons of a bird. Each of the score was exactly like every other, and side by side and one after another they flew across the deep noon sky. So they sweep by close above some ship, with sweet voices advising mariners of a greater glory a-mid-ocean than

where sails are often met round the coast; though well they know that from the vacant, unislanded main few venturers have ever returned. Chiron had no use in his cavern for a cloth so splendid: and he had determined to devote this to the honour of Thamyris. They laid his body, wholly enveloped, along the turf beside the grave, while they trod into that the autumn-tinted bracken which Achilles had been cutting with a sickle, and, armful after armful, had made a mountainous heap of. Next they lowered him in the great blue cloth on to that sun-saturated couch. Then Chiron took his lyre and sang

A gentle spring was that long past
Which brought thee to my cave;
For thought yet more than action brave,
O daring spirit, now thou hast
Gleaned all that feeble mortals give
To those in whom intenser joy has sought to live!
Here woodland peace broods ever, here
Shall water alway carol in thine ear.

Caudon and Rhoetus now chanted the usual chorus of "Last Farewell," Achilles and myself piping in as well as their loud voices would let us. The rest of the bracken was then thrown down and on that the dark loam, the turfs were replaced, wine spilled in libation and grain strewn. The rites were ended: the two centaurs shouldered spade and mattock and clattered off. Achilles asked if he might go into the woods with his bow and arrow to shoot something. Chiron nodded consent and came to examine my ankle. While he uncased it and did it up again with fresh leaves, I asked why, if Thamyris so loved the lonely hills and scorned men, he was so angry at seeing them crowd about other rhapsodists. When he had finished with my foot he replied "One of our friend's hymns is now trotting in my head," then touching his lyre he chanted

From the west upward
I toiled heavy-hearted;
From the east joyous,
Poising his weight on
An arching instep,
Came man to meet me.

And high in the azure,
Where the rocks ended
We sat down, friends.
He heard there how often
Was said, shown or felt
The thing that rebuked me;

Then laughed and pretended
That what the hand fashioned,
House, sword or dead body,
Alone remained;
Thoughts and intentions
Lost their existence.

His glad voice inveigled
Belief from my candour;
And lo! he was gone.
Poising my weight on
An arching instep,
Down I came, gaily
Facing the sunset,
As though in the sea-port
That glittered beneath it
I had not yet smitten
The sonorous lyre:
As though the folk there
Had come from the eastward
That very morning
And found empty houses

And ships abandoned,
Needing alone to be cleaned and re-painted,
And meant to make them gay as spring flowers;
And were sure in the twilight
To gather about me.

There, that is his own answer to your question. I do not think he craved just *any* praise, nor did he much over-prize his own gift; and you see he was not thinking of this coast, but of one facing the other way, so that the poet could arrive from the quarter opposite to the sun and meet him at noon on the peak. As much as to say "Not myself, nor this town's people; but any place, any people, any poet." He worshipped man, and it angered him to see homespun preferred to the skyey fabric the god had helped him weave. He regretted his violence and could not live without those eyes it had cost him." Having drawn these sentences one by one from his sad heart Chiron lapsed into silence, till I asked "But why did he address the Muses as enemies in his last hymn, if what the folk said was quite false?"—"It is strange! Can they have appeared to him smartly fledged in white plumage, with dapper tail and wings and vulture heart? Stately women clothed in daffodil chitons delighted my gaze the only time I ever had a glimpse of them."—"When was that?"—"I was scarcely older than yourself, and woke in a cave to see them sitting and resting at its mouth, delicately grouped against the dawn. I remember Euterpe's lap full of flowers, and Melpomene; for her hair was stormy, black and unbound, and a deep brown cloak had slipped from her shoulders but still hung over her elbows: it was only afterwards that I regretted not having noted the features of Urania, but assuredly no single one of them had the eye of an hawk. They rose as I woke, and strolled on. I crept after them, but when I turned the buttress of rock, no glad-robed figure was in sight

though it seemed that choral voices floated in the air; yet soon I found myself listening to silence, so could not be sure."—"It must be sad to sing unpraised, however beautiful the words."—"Yes, boy, and the ecstasy that sings is counterfaced with a destroying rage: that is perhaps why his darkened soul figured the Muses as birds of prey."—"Do you know any more of his rhapsodies?"—"Perhaps I can recall another" and he struck some strange bell-like notes and then sang

Leap, Ibex, leap: the drop
From that mountain turret top
Is sheer two hundred feet!
Crash head foremost to the rock;
Those massive hoops, thy curved horns, take the shock
And throw thee up! Albeit
Tossed by their supple springs,
Without the help of wings,
Scarcely may eye believe
Thou hast righted in the air!
Rashness thou dost retrieve;
Whence thou wast bounced, even there
Arrivest without let;
Four sturdy hooves of jet
Plant thee on the slab thine eye
Had chosen from on high.

So melodist that haunts
The spirit-firing peaks,
And deep in azure chants,
Must take like dizzy leap
Back to some sea-board town
To find the praise he seeks.

And would he still his fervour keep,
As fine resilience will he need
So feately to light down,

Hoop-hornèd Goat, as thine,
By chamois herds acclaimed divine!

A god's grace truly will he need
If he be not to suffer, not to bleed..
A shattered heart and brain a-fire,
A trodden mantle and snapt lyre!
And how by headlong rapture whirled and blinded
Should he know where 'tis won or how to find it?..
That unpredictable address
Whose magic cleaves the rough quartz stone
And makes its secret crystals known,
When the most boorish bless
The most divine
And flash back to their eyes the grace by which they
shine?

This history has been written with Chiron's help, who says we have often found more appropriate words than were actually used, yet have not departed from truth as Clio bestows it on those who do her unfeigned reverence.

* * * * * *

I covered this sheepskin years ago in the cave and have kept it ever since: now I must soon bequeath it to the care of others. Achilles and Chiron are both long since dead, and who wants to hear the lays of Thamyrus now? I never picked up the slough of any god; though a bit later, when my foot was sufficiently healed for me to limp about, I found behind some bushes where Caudon or Rhætus had chucked it the filthy ragged homespun mantle of Thamyrus; for when I spread it out one could see where the blood had run down from his eyes by the dark stains. I folded it and laid it at the foot of his grave and raised a pyramid of stones over it, bringing them toilsomely from the pool each day as my

ankle grew stronger..even as in two or three years' time I was adding crooked letter to crooked letter on the inside of this skin that Thamyris might be remembered. And as I wrote I was persuaded, in spite of Chiron's presentiment and that vivid dream of a white chlamys broidered over with blue, violet and silver serpents, that such "magnificent joys" would never be mine: which secret conviction, as I grew a beard and it grew grey, has been proved correct. Mæonides, best loved of all rhapsodists, may have found it: though when I heard him chant the war for Troy, he also was dressed in homespun and already blind; but old Agenor has kept his two eyes as safely as this sheepskin.

NIOBE
TO
PENELOPE WHEELER
BY WHOSE GENEROUS INITIATIVE
THIS POEM
AND THROUGH WHOM ITS HEROINE
BECAME AUDIBLE
ON FEBRUARY IX MCMXXX

CHARACTERS

PAN

A DAUGHTER

A MOTHER

A PRINCE

A PRINCESS

QUEEN NIOBE

NOTE

The drama is to be overheard from behind curtain or screen. The voices should begin as music ceases and this should recommence as they end.

PAN'S VOICE [deep, mellow and pervasive]

I touch the pipes of the noon air:

Enchantment soon, as by a stair,

Tow'rds the light, her fellow true,

Mounts and trembles through the blue.

Yet, sometimes, then, I, Pan,

Stop and lay my hand on man

Who conceives security

Where nothing is save me.

GIRL'S VOICE Mother!

WOMAN'S VOICE

What brings you home? Have you the Queen's leave?

DAUGHTER Mother!

MOTHER You shake, are pale and have no voice.

DAUGHTER Mother! The feast is ended.

MOTHER Over at noon? Zeus help us!

DAUGHTER 'Twas heard by all.

MOTHER What was?

DAUGHTER How should I know?

MOTHER Speak sense!

DAUGHTER A voice, a sound of words ... without speaker...

At large...not created by bodily organ...words!...

No tongue drove them

Forth between lips:

The breath from no heaving chest

Caused them to roar.

MOTHER You are mad!

PAN [as to himself] Mad? No! Not yet: I Pan am still,
For both of you dumb as an hill.

MOTHER Why don't you speak?

DAUGHTER

The Queen stood with bowl raised to her lips:

Her last words had proposed health to her children.

She had said perhaps more than she meant. You know words,

Words even as sheep are ever eager to follow
False lead and if gap tempt..one..two, three,
The whole flock will break through. Besides, the heart
Is never easy under the load of feeling;
But like horse whose pack slips to one side
Is dragged from the path down some bank. So it had
been..

After a great gush of words, she raised her bowl...

As thunderclap fills huge cloud,
Yet clearer than man's voice the hall was filled:

The guests set down their cups:

The Queen let fall her bowl:

Down all her snowy chiton wine splashed red:

That silver basin trundled on the floor.

MOTHER What did the voice say?

DAUGHTER Gave the Queen the lie.

MOTHER What had she said then?

DAUGHTER Boasted her seven sons
More fair than Apollo, their sisters than Artemis.
Herself more chaste than Leto, then came that voice...

PAN "Leto is chaster,
Her children peerless;
Drink at your peril!"

MOTHER Who spake?

DAUGHTER [trembling] That was the voice!

MOTHER Never!

DAUGHTER

It was...though my heart stopped not dead as when
With hearts dead still all stood, guests, servants, Queen,
Prince and Princess, aghast...[she sobs.]

PAN Your hearts revive and these words seem
A murmur sighed from summer's dream.

MOTHER Tell quickly...you escaped?

DAUGHTER

First the Queen shook as who would move yet could not;
And then in me, who watched from the door, something

Gave and I turned and fled.

PAN My dancing drums
When terror runs.

MOTHER Look, daughter, look!
A cloud an island of snow!..
Nearer to the palace it bears each on one knee
A God, a Goddess how lovely, bow bent, string drawn!

PAN

Me now you faintly hear, though distance quells
My hooves that drum high lawns among the fells.

DAUGHTER

They will not shoot;...must not...have not shot...

MOTHER

They did, they did, and will again ; don't look!

PAN When the heart's drum-tap stops
My heels leap and my pipe drops.

MOTHER Forth all come now.

I dare not look, will not see..hark! those drums?

DAUGHTER Prince and Princess together,
They run on the green hill meadow.

Guest and servant

Scatter to leave them free course.

But No, but Yes,

Where a young man ran,

Flame eats the grass;

Where a maiden scudded,

A wreath of blue smoke quits a place scorched black.

Again those bows flash;

Two more are consumed!

Again, again, again!

The youngest and fleetest alone are left;

They toil nearer and nearer.

MOTHER Hide, O hide!

PAN Those feet refuse to advance,
Come, force them to prance!
Dance, stiff-limbed terror, dance!

[The voices of the youngest Niobids come now within earshot.]

THE PRINCE Have they no heart?

This god and this goddess?

THE PRINCESS How should I know?

Where can we hide?

THE PRINCE

Are men no more to them than rabbits to us?

THE PRINCESS

Our brothers' limbs are like charred gorse stems.

Crouch, crouch, it is our turn next!

THE PRINCE

Their worship will starve. Who after this will bow?

THE PRINCESS Hide, do not talk!

Run, do not think!

Could we but dive through earth, worm under rock!

THE PRINCE What is light unseen,

Beauty unloved?

Nothing, or as useless as that!

THE PRINCESS What senseless raving!

Our mother mocked theirs with insulting words;

Who will pity us dead?

“She is paid” they will say

“For extravagant pride

With extravagant woe!”

THE PRINCE

Stop! Let me die face to my foes! I look up

Into the blue home of their dazzling hate.

—Let fly the flame-feathered dart! Aim well!—Ah!

THE PRINCESS Black and misshapen

He crumbles in my arms!

Fragments of coal and dust!—

Let mine fall where his fell,

Finish your work!

[A second shriek and then a pause.]

PAN I quaffed those last echoes like wine;

My goat-half heaved and felt divine.

[A pause.]

MOTHER The God and Goddess are gone.

DAUGHTER The cloud too! Where?

MOTHER Their work is done, look!

DAUGHTER Hush, hide again!

She is coming.

MOTHER Who? Where?

DAUGHTER Niobe is coming, the Queen.

MOTHER

They will return to shoot; we must hide; we must!...

DAUGHTER

Her bones are soft with terror. See, she strains
To lift her feet, she stops, looks up for those
Whose hatred she expects.

MOTHER Hide, hide at once!

NIOBE

I am your target next; fumble not; fit
Fresh arrows to your strings! Quick! Oh quick!
I die to feel those adamant points drive through...
Oh, end!.. Oh end my pain.

Why, live I yet?

Mother of those who were ...

PAN ‘Who were?’ yea, were
Struck! calcined! Left like sites of shepherd fires
Scorched on the green hillside..like prints
Of seven strides taken by two... Yea, like this..
Like that..like anything but what they were!

NIOBE Inhuman hunters, tarry no longer; char
Me with an incandescent bolt, I want
The unmistakable pang of very death.

Is it that tears so blind mine eyes, or is
The blue sky emptied of you and those clouds
On which you knelt to aim? Am I
Still left? Is it possible I should live?
Have not you struck me through twice seven times?

Twice seven times I felt your cruelty,
A death that killed me, yet was not my death,
But visibly, horribly flashed and consumed a son,
Or left me a daughter short. Not merely dead,
Gone!...

O might I but have fully fed mine eyes
Upon each darling body, washed it, dressed it,
Kissed it and spoken to it.. watched the pyre
Built and the slick flames climb from log to log,
Straighten up in united roar and blaze,
Then fail above that furnace which shrinks .. is filmed
With white ash slowly, till but a low heap
Be left for wind to stir. This had been much!...

Why leave to picture how the limp corpse drifted
(Like those whose sons are drowned far out at sea)
Drifted, sank, or was cast on lonely beach
By the desisting storm .. to follow thus,
Though only in conjecture, might absorb
And so relieve! No, utter and unique
Is my unmitigated bereavement, my
Grief that has nothing but unemployable strength.

[A silence.]

PAN I, Pan, feel sadness all as wide as earth ..
The full deep clearness of a rain-washed heaven.

MOTHER

Except that the dead fall and she stands, I
Should think her but a corpse.

DAUGHTER Her heart is dead,
Perhaps her mind ... No, she has heard us .. hush!

NIOBE

Not as they died, their mother dies; ... though slain,
An infinite craving for death that cannot die
Will lift her woe to unforgiving skies
Whose beauty remembers not that beauty she
Can not forget. Niobe shall not burn,
For that is quickly over .. she must last.

Cold, cold and idle as a stone is grief;
For it must watch the sun arise and set..
Must feel the intolerable loveliness
Of every day's commencement and flushed close..
Must feel the consummation of each night's
Unapproachable beauty. Phoebus will pass;
Artemis lag behind to show herself
Almost as bright as he is when alone;
And both will know I watch them ; I shall know
How they intended that these eyes should see
(Still washed with tears, kept by huge grief alive)
What, only to me, is not a welcome sight.

MOTHER Poor thing, she weeps.

DAUGHTER She does not raise her hands ..
Just lets the tears stream down across her face ..
Carved stone might weep so.

MOTHER I doubt if she will ever find voice more.

DAUGHTER

The palace women dread to draw anigh.
The men stand farther off.

MOTHER She still looks up
As though she could see more than empty sky.

DAUGHTER Hush ! She will again speak ...
Yea, thus a marble mask might yearn to speak.

NIOBE Yes, they are lovely, Leto, thy twain are,
Who, hourly, daily, monthly, yearly change
And yet are ever young and ever fair;
How should unchanging memory rival them,
Though it can multiply their forms by seven?
Mine never returned to any single age!

Nor could I ever tell which best became them
Or now or then or soon ; for human pride
Gropes and is never sure. How should they vie
In vividness with the large lamps of heaven?
And tears, which make those dazzling, wear love out
As rain blears an inscription. Loss may brim

A mind; Time sips and sips; the salt cup soon
Lies empty as a skull.

[A pause; and then with a groan]

What is a child

But vanquished by the re-invigorate
Resplendent freshness of the Sun and Moon?

MOTHER She has said all she can
And still her face runs tears.

DAUGHTER

Her women touch her as they might a statue ...
As though afraid to admit that stone is stone ...
Silent they leave the rock that was their queen!

PAN Poor riven rock, hast thou no tongue?

Are those but tears that from thee drop?

Poor tortured heart, are they still wrung

From thee, or will they never stop,

But marble bleed them,

Though no one heed them,

A dripping well?

Naught's left to tell;

This Queen accepts at last

Her loneliness;

Stone is what was aghast;

Nothing feels less

Than that for which, while it felt,

Every eye, every heart, must melt.

IDYLLIC DIALOGUES

THE SEA IS KIND
TO
HELENE APPIA

WHO INITIATED AND DIRECTED THE
EXTENSION TO THE INVADED AREAS
OF THE RED CROSS SERVICE FOR SUP-
PLYING NEWS OF THE LOST, WOUNDED
AND IMPRISONED TO THEIR FRIENDS

MCMXIV TO MCMXIX

*Once, needing rest, quiet, impersonal kindness,
You persuaded a friendly fisherman tow in a row-boat
Your languor a mile from the beach, anchor and leave you
To ride untended for hours. In the waves' cradle
You, motherlike lay and nursed the health that was born then,
Only aware of the seemingly empty heavens,
Only aware that a semblance of gentleness rocked you;
Thus daily you proved the sea kind as Danaë found it;
Then, graciously grant my poem your name for an anchor,
Since it too apparently tenantless floats upon vastness.*

I. THE NYMPHS

EVARNE Yes, I will stop and talk:
But urge not that old suit;
At best men are like rats
As nimble in the water as on land.

PLEXAURA

O sister of the Sea, they age, ail, die;
But they foresee it; each man patiently
Provides against that time with frugal zeal,
And by eliciting and fostering kindness
From children, neighbours, friends; yea, here or there,
A man succeeds, his farewell crowns his life.

EVARNE

These Greeks are best; they have some hardihood:
Their land with sea is kneaded up and leavened.
Yet how they feared those Persians.. lied, and deceived
Each other! sold each other to a foe
Who showed more honour and more steadiness!

PLEXAURA

Their breed needs crossing yet, but has improved.

EVARNE

Gods have wasted passion
On women; nymphs on men:
The race, savage, cared but for food and shelter;
Cares but for wealth and power; never will care
For life's full beauty.

PLEXAURA

I oft have watched men well employed together.
Their perfidies and riots fled from mind,
They re-enforced my gladdest hopes as when,
At length, the lips that only sucked or crowded
Utter two words .. as when, with clutching arms
On staggering legs, my babe dared step on step.

EVARNE

Since thou hast yielded to a man's desire,
A milky mood toward men becomes thee, sister.

PLEXAURA

A touching sight, I find, groups of them anxious
With stone or wood to perfect ship or house..
To cart the harvest home before a storm
That threatens, burst: each
Given, accepted; all
Equalled by intent.

EVARNE

The peace their danger welds fissures ere dry.

PLEXAURA

True, each would rule,
Who, all as one, might retrench ignorance,
Defeating weight and distance and dense matter;
Then sort into attuned confederacy
The kind and lovely creatures of the earth,
Till it were gardened like this land of Greece.

EVARNE Have they the means?

PLEXAURA They supersede us, it is prophesied.

EVARNE

Look at them .. hasty, greedy, callous, warped,
Deceitful, headstrong, lethargic.

PLEXAURA

Look at them .. good-humoured, free with aid,
Patient in skill, improving on their best.

EVARNE

We of the sea helped save this land of Greece..
I myself did so: but, doomed, why should we think
This Athens is a promise to the world,
A foretaste of some general excellence
To be attained by those bath-shunning hordes
Whose numbers and unlikeness threaten her?

PLEXAURA

Why were we doomed, unless to be excelled?

EVARNE The destinies are crabb'd;

The girl whose heart expects
An echo from her grandam's, may not be

More her own dupe than we in questioning them.

PLEXAURA

Infinite time and space leave equal room
For hope and for despair. In hearts like ours
One of the two must reign. No eloquence
Disguises which. Sister, thou art hope's.

EVARNE Let that be so; why should I give myself
To these successors, in whom the best of strength
Is featureless plasticity of soul
And inextinguishable multitude?

I have been what I am a thousand years,
And shrink from thought of breeding by a man.

PLEXAURA

Not any man, but just one image of Hermes,
Untamed, delightful, thou, as I have, may.

EVARNE No boy..some grisled sailor
Hard as his knotted ropes,
Seasoned to endure a month's exhausting storm:
Such men have had my admiration; they,
Though I do not believe it, might win more.

PLEXAURA

We know men better; they have taken our land,
Save wild rough slopes, marshes and caverned crags,
But have reserved us groves paled in, kept sacred,
And paid us with fair temples, altars, stones
Inscribed with kindly thought,
Perfected lovingly to enhance our land
And link them to us with clear piety.

EVARNE

These Greeks!..but they are not a tithe of men.

PLEXAURA

Men yet may make the sea as fair as Greece,
With fleets of ships as handsome as a town,
Or prim like temples, on some lonely voyage.

EVARNE

More likely will they load it with filthy gaols

k

Crammed with slaves wincing from whip-handed
thieves.

PLEXAURA

That too perhaps, but not for ever, Sister.

EVARNE

Own to this. Have not centuries passed since thou
Hast climbed a hill

Whence ocean could neither be inhaled or glimpsed?

PLEXAURA So long? May be.

EVARNE

Hark; un-sea-penetrated lands there are
Where dear men grovel. I can let thee know
Of what sort continental daimons are;
How they prompt worshippers and help their arts.

Revisiting yon battered wrecks, old Glaucus,

Only a few days since had fancy taken

By a sprawled timber god. It owned the scowl

Apter to browbeat than leer of satyr carved

Time out of mind, to kindle laughter. Daubed

With colour, stunted arm and leg were starred

Against four flat plank wings; it hung in chains

Over a Persian trireme's weather bow,

And, freed, cork-like led Glaucus to the air;

Who ste ered it next to this sequestered cove

Where, summer-long, holds school for young sea
nymphs

His vast indulgence.. teaching origins,

And, through immeasurable theogonies,

Deducing patience and that sager kindness

Not fanciful about its object's merits

Which raw minds stumble at. I, with some,

My younger sisters, sunning on these sands,

Watched his refined and venerable beauty land

And drag that obscene idol from the waves.

He came and sat among us with a sigh

Which pleaded that coevals of the ocean

Should not be laughed at. Noon's untempered heat
Set steaming his strange prize: warping ere long
It uttered "Hoch!" aloud: once then again.
First we but lazily laughed to find our drowse
Thus troubled; then this thing besmirched with red.
Became so eloquent with rap and creak,
Now wild, now plaintive, now imperative,
That we were roused to wonder;
When from its navel rose a filament
Of ochre-coloured smoke that, as it wreathed
With vague and flowing lunges, made a few
Which half suggested how articulate arm
Is cranked and stretches in the act to yawn;
And surely soon there were twin ghostly members
Gesticulating o'er a phantom torso.
In lieu of again dissipating, this
Odd freak of shadowy coils and turbid gloom,
As one from kneeling rises, rose from off
The belly of that log, solidified,
Changed substance, even as water turns to ice,
Till swarthy Arab black as bronze stood there.
Moulded and knotted every limb and joint
To serve a rabid fury which the face
Expressed with beautiful precision. Down
His godship stepped; the doll with loud report,
As though from top to fork wedge-riven, lay
In separate halves. That handsome scowler smiled,
Then with a royal gesture of content
Addressed our wonder.

"Behold the lowering guide of that hot storm
"Whom Bedouins white-tunicked and black-cloaked
"Hope to resemble, when on feately-hooved
"And sooty-manèd steeds their dreaded hordes
"Break on Chaldea, Babylonia, Bashan.
"Intent to lift the new-bound sheaves of wheat,

“They ride through standing corn, rise in the stirrup,
“And laugh to watch the coward reaper’s heels
“Compass a fine velocity, thread field-paths,
“Or leap the dykes of irrigated plains.
“But devastation from mine inroads stretches
“Across Euphrates further than they dare.
“The industrious Ninevite, the huckster grey
“With watching scored tale lengthen down his wall
“Beneath his hated Median debtor’s name,
“Dread me, and hang near casement, over door,
“To guard each southward-facing aperture,
“Rude effigies smaller than this of me.
“Charm bootless ’gainst my veering pillared dust
“Which chokes each sluice in vainly watered gardens,
“Desiccates the velvet pudency of roses,
“And leaves green gummy tendrils like to naught
“But ravelled dry and dusty ends of cord ;
“Clamming the ox’s mouth, cementing up
“The bleeding nostrils of the terrified horse,
“Hissing through shutters, cascading through smoke
vents,
“Appalling thought and hope. Down tent and shed
“Are slammed, snap go tall trees : the lion’s lord,
“I, hoarse with mirth, arrive, dance and pass on.
“Thereafter idol-makers drive brisk trade,
“Are primed with eloquence about my ways ..
“How sure to swerve aside or face about
“My wrath on meeting with its proper scowl.
“Each outward fleering image of mine ire
“Convinces me that there, an honoured guest,
“I lodge already ; vain else were bolt and hinge.
“The wary owner’s house I skirt around,
“And that invade where some imprudent fool
“Has thought too long on what mine image costs,
“Or braved my shoulder with stout staple and bar.
“For wider knowledge and travel the itch came

“To me who witnessed Xerxes’ massing troops :
“Then to the smallest of my shapes transformed,
“A black and brittle flea, I cabin found,
“(Taking advantage of a votary
“Who’d bought this larger scarecrow for his ship)
“Deep in the worm-drilled timber of its flanks.
“Enough has seen and suffered one who hates
“Cold dampness and knows now what drowning means.

“Your Persian worships no god, save the sun
“Who never walks on earth : but in Greek ports
“I have espied gods busied among men,
“Seen you whose place of revel is the sea
“Anxious a battle should be so and so’s.
“One goddess (caped in azure cloth befringed
“With living snakes, while from its centre yelled,
“Sick with fierce pain, a feminine despair,
“Whose beauty still subsisting froze the blood)
“Appeared upon the trireme which stove ours,
“Tall as its mast, and with terrific lance
“Drove back our consorts, while we sank unhelped.
“The supposed favourite of a distant sun,
“Throned on that high brow called Heracleon,
“Beneath his gilded parasol fumed white
“To watch his navy shattered and dispersed;
“While she I speak of, like a piece of sky,
“Descended all athrill to set earth right,
“Stooped and sage-whispered her Themistocles.

“Farewell, ye humid daimons.
“Allied with unkinged ship-builders enjoy
“This beryl desert, restless, cold and wet.
“My home is stifling motionless dumb sand
“Which only at my bidding mounts the wind!”
With that, upright and rigid, his form rose..
Stiff feet down stretched, finger and thumb tips poised

Upon the pelvic crest of either hip...
Slowly at first but gathering impetus
Till toward the zenith like bird-bolt he shot;
His shape became a dot, that dot a speck,
That speck invisible.

PLEXAURA What dire aliens
Yet have divine strength and our grace to escape
From visible bonds and work on unperceived!

EVARNE

Look, yonder lie the two halves of his image.

PLEXAURA But what said Glaucus?

EVARNE

Sighed first, and stroked his beard; at length rose up,
Turned gravely seawards, murmured, and then spoke:
Behold *it* moves and changeth like a face,
Is vaster than the vastest tract of sand,
Has shaped our natures, and will yet mould others
Nearer its heart than we;
For even my wisdom worships darkling still.
Though I to you seem of an equal date,
This face was once a child's, *that* never younger
Than when to-day the youngest of you found
Her yet more frolic play-fellow in it.

Nothing shall ever soil it; battles, wrecks,
Though grosser than this fight of Salamis,
Shall never so oppress its deep clear womb
To spoil its smile, or take from its grand rage
That unmalignant uncalculating force
Which by a sheer integrity shames plans;
For they at best serve some poor sect of hearts."

PLEXAURA

Deep thanks for thy report. Kiss we farewell.

EVARNE Another kiss, but with it a few words.
Sister, the ocean in me loathes that thought
Of child-bearing by man.

They call the mingled nature "Hero," we

The pure divine.

Powers of the air bred thee from pregnant earth;

I feel myself

Fathered and mothered both out of the wave:

And though I muse with pleasure on ships ..on

Their builders ..on their handling, yet no germ

Of such tumultuous prelude swells in me,

As, ere I followed Triton to a cave,

Taught me my tenderness

Might ripen to a mother's.

PLEXAURA

I'll not persuade thee, for thou art persuaded:

The occasion will reveal to thee my foresight,

Fare thee well.

EVARNE

And thou, fare better than thy prophecy.

II. GOATHERD AND SHEPHERD MENALCAS

He saw but would avoid me! Eucritos, Hoy!
Escape thus thou shalt not! Come home with me!

EUCRITOS Forgive me; for this once!

MENALCAS

Friends must not pass without exchanging news.

EUCRITOS

Another day.

MENALCAS Thou art in love. Ho, ho!
Tell me about it! Thou art full; feed me!
Then we will in and eat together.

EUCRITOS No!

MENALCAS

Sit thee down here; rug-shaped, this willow's shade
Is deep with springy parsley as bear's coat.

EUCRITOS

Menalcas...

MENALCAS Come, boy, whisper if thou list.

EUCRITOS The destinies intend me for the sea:
Mine is no herdsman's blood, but drives me hence;
No shepherdess will ever nurse my son.

Thou hearest salt-water lap the rocks down there;
I hear it from a thousand bights and bays.

My pulse leaps with the waves and calms with them;
I must to Athens, that great home of ships.

MENALCAS

I looked for raving, praise of some girl's eye!

EUCRITOS Thou knowest, Menalcas,
I built my hut not sheltered but exposed,
Round not right-angled.

A separate window like a mouth to breathe,
No matter whence the breeze might blow..

A separate window like an eye to watch
From off the headland lawn that prompting wink
Of ocean musing "Why" wherever he

May glimpse me at some pitiable task.
Long sea arms reach behind me, and small hills
Have waded half across the bay in front,
Dividing my horizon many times
But leaving every wind an open gate.
I've sold my sheep and try to thrive off goats.
MENALCAS Goats give far less trouble;
And, though they may not yield so much at best,
There is not half the risk is run with sheep.

EUCRITOS

Menalcas, thou hast seen those poplar poles,
Each a dhow's mast deep driven in the soil,
Ten to the round of plastered wattled wall;
The wide-meshed rope-net weighted with huge stones
Which dangling just beneath the salient eaves
Secures the thatch in the hurricane's despite.

I love my hut;
Yet my heart tells me it is not a ship.

MENALCAS

To buy sails and build vessel would cost more.

EUCRITOS

Searched by the moonlight slanting through its door,
Menalcas, I have seen my home's one room
Aglint with shells that serve for platter and bowl;
The model ship that hangs behind the altar
Enshrined, with tanned nets cloudily festooned;
That bunch of corals pendant from the roof
Like blood some wounded god shed in salt water,
My treasures all, in miniature I saw them
Crowded into a mirror small, round, deep,
And pleased to hold them.. even a sea-nymph's eye.
I sate beside her on my bed, Menalcas,
And listened to her wonder-laden talk.

MENALCAS

What was her name?

EUCRITOS Hadst thou the gift, Menalcas,

By peering through the portal of mine eye,
The little double of her perfectness
That there has made a home and glides about
Would make thee wiser than ever my words shall.

MENALCAS Yet tell her name.

EUCRITOS Attired in thin veiling,
Green and gold-hemmed and cockle-brooched, with
groups

Of pleats whose elegance from air to wave,
From wet to dry, undragged passes, while
Through them, like drowned snow in a pool, broad
cheek

Of limb or torso surges, gleams, turns, dives..

She lives within that web-bemimicked sea
As large white fish flow on, now near, now deep.

MENALCAS

Her name, her name, her name!

EUCRITOS Why clamour thus?
Theselips, though they had touched hers, never asked it.

MENALCAS

Dead women are there who return by night;
Their love is mortal!

Some rival goat-herd paid a witch, and hopes
To see thy manhood melt from off thy bones.

EUCRITOS This was a Nerëid of blood divine,
Who two long nights enchanted me with stories
(Sea-battle or lorn sailor bound to wreckage)
Deeds such as only eyes like hers have watched.

Enduring courage, inexhaustible effort,
Such as redeemed Ulysses from nine deaths,
Had wrought her to prompt admiration of man;
Till to watch lad at sundown set his nets
Or in the morning hauling them ashore,
Though he were drowned in peace, reminded her
Of men whose mettle out-wore days of storm,
Of men who fought outnumbered one to seven.

Her thoughts from me harked back to Salamis
And so absorbed her
That unaware she floated near my skiff,
Was by the current well-nigh borne against it
Before she knew that I had seen, had loved her.
Nor was she sad to lodge with me, for I
Received the influx of her very spirit
Until meseemed we should achieve one soul
And move together with a single impulse...
Herd goats? No! my life waits for me out there.

MENALCAS

Was this that thing so rarely seen, a nymph?
We hang their praise on tablets in large caves:
In some an altar or a statue stands,
And wenches dedicate their trinkets to them,
Hoping they will cajole the god of storms
Or lure shoals where a comely youth drags net.
Yet oft while woman sleeps her phantom walks,
Obedient to some witch, goes on an errand
The poor fool slumbering dreams not of at all,
Or sees performed in fragments much confused.

EUCRITOS

Peace to thy fears of witchcraft. Here a mind
Akin to Homer's moved in living words.

MENALCAS Women have souls so easily unmoored
That drift away on hearing wise charm chanted.
Lads of thy years so easily are duped.
Some influence from the meteor-laden night
Sinks like a plummet through a mile of sea
And roots and twines and stirreth 'mid their hair..
They rove for days as though a star did stray
And they must follow under it everywhere;
Mistaking thoughts for things and hopes for deeds,
Till some at last recount what never happened
With all the eloquence experience gives.

EUCRITOS No matter whether this took place or not,

I sell my goats and land and go seafaring.

MENALCAS

Doubt not I shall have heard about some girl
Who dreamed she passed those two nights in thy hut,
Ere thou hast reached the haven at Piraeus.

EUCRITOS Farewell, Menalcas, I must find a buyer.

MENALCAS Tell me a little first what thy nymph said.

EUCRITOS Thou hast no credit for things so divine.

MENALCAS Nay, nay, I swear!

EUCRITOS A dirty sorceress
That mumbles in a cave at slave-girl's bidding
Could dictate words that I'd repeat to thee?

MENALCAS

Eucritos dear, I vow my heart doth ache
To think this the last time we two confer.
Wed it to memory with rare nymphly lore.

EUCRITOS I cannot look at thee and think of her.

MENALCAS

Then gaze into the brook; I'll be forgotten.

EUCRITOS

Menalcas, see, a frog squats on that stone
And holds his head as thou dost, pondering
On some low explanation for high things.
Laugh not so loud! he hears thee! Hush! his thought
Had all but pleased him. There, we've put him out.
What grace he gains from swimming! 'tis the water
Compels his nature to move nattily.

Who'd walk if he could swim? Who'd swim if he
Could sail?

MENALCAS Who'd sail if he could fly?

EUCRITOS I:

For water better cradles thoughts I woo.

MENALCAS

But thou hast never steered on wide-spread wings.

EUCRITOS An eagle soaring on a day like this
Views everything a vast horizon laps;

But keel that slips across this dimpled bay
Glides over mines of mystery unexplored.
The coaster waits to see beyond the cape
An unprefigured stretch of beach or cliff:
The over-towering sight pines for surprise.
How sad and weary seems the king of birds!
Contrast with him yon kinglet ever peeping
Into dim labyrinths pillared with stalks
Of mallow and loosestrife. Thy mind, Menalcas,
Sated like eagle's ken
With general conclusions
Shuts out all expectation from thy life.

MENALCAS

Well, well, report thy goddess; let me feast
At second-hand on what you wrens discover.

EUCRITOS Thou art a beggar to me for my dreams:
This exquisite event that's mine to tell,
For thee a dream remembered, is for me
Very yesterday.

MENALCAS I wait, like boy in his
A first-time-borrowed skiff, what lies beyond
The promontory of thy next digression.

EUCRITOS

Menalcas, she caught the gunnel, found her feet,
And stood beside my shallop on the sand.
The ripples toying her dark tresses tried
To strand their ends like sea-weed on her breast
And sometimes seemed to yearn up towards her throat.
“O beautiful goddess, how I love thy hands
That have in sunken ships restored the order
Which violent storm and panic had confounded.”
“Dear youth, we dwellers in the deep are strange.”
She paused, yet her dark eyes consoled me for
The discontinuance of that breathèd music.
She sighed and proved regretfulness divine.
“Immortal lips are wary of fond vows:

They give, but never promise." Then her smile
Gave all the happiness my heart could hold:
"I leave thee now not to bereave thee later."
How dared I, O Menalcas, if my fate
Is not inspired vastly, how dared I
Throwing one arm round her, swing o'er the stern
And hold her while we swayed above our feet
Weightless in water; then a tiptoe shoreward
Draw her, but half reluctant? There are times
When sense is captured by the tyrannous will,
Forbid to know what actions are performed,
And isolated from its whereabouts.

The darkening dusk then helped my thought suspend
Perception, that her words might be well mused,
"They give but never promise."

Due to the frailty of our nature is it
That human spouses promise.

In gods joy dreads not but greets danger, is
Intensified by solitude:
Being the simplest, surest, purest,
Most persuasive and securest
Self-assertion;
Delicate as gorgeous mealy wings are,
Brave as hymns that lark up-towered sings are.

Self-desertion,
Impossible to joy,
Never tempted god alloy
Fidelity to good, because
He or she deserted was.

Crowned with this interpretation, thought
Released my senses, which discovered then
How we in step paced towards tall quiet trees
That filled the gloaming with their patient presence.
Her feet aware of grass, she stopped, and I
Knelt in mute worship there. "Lad, be warned!"
At that my tongue could help me:

“I do not ask what man from woman craves,
Submission, faith, toil ; since for these they look
So soon as troubles and children intervene,
However they were blinded with delight
When first they found their pleasure kindle hers.
No, I have watched them, questioned them, and turned,
Resolved to live out there.
The welcoming silence of still virgin strands,
Islands none have sailed to,
Unentered estuaries,
Untalked-of birds and beasts and folk remote,
Whose speech perplexes those who know most tongues ..
All that lies out of reach for anchored hearts
Calls and inveigles and bewitches mine.
How can a rover promise his return?
Ulysses after twenty years came back,
But could he rest?
Penelope died lonely.
Unwilling he departed that first time;
The second time his reason could not bind
An imperious will to go.
Travel begot the taste in him :
In me desire enforces
Travel.”

A finger on its casket’s hidden spring
Revealeth not prized gem more suddenly
Than these words freed the frankness of her mind.
“Then we are lovers !
Flowers breathe round us by the dark concealed.
I have passed twinkling shoals of baby fish,
Myriads on myriads replenishing the gulfs
For all the waste and slaughter of the year.
When scent from cowslip meads is borne off shore
Our youth renews itself, we leave the depths
And come to gaze on wild fruit-trees in bloom.

Up and down the many-terraced hills
Like lacy veils dropped by Olympian brides
They hang, from soiling earth
Held off by demon's arm,
Till Hermes down or Eros, Psyche bidding,
Descend to fetch them back.
Great Ocean's heart grows human, tender tears
Surprise our steady lids and mist the sense
That pity dims not in the murderous battle...
Hark!"

We paced the steep path up and up through pines;
And she did pause to leave the nightingale
The whole attentiveness
Of that rapt neighbourhood.

"There is a sorcery in well-loved words:
But unintelligible music still
Probes to the buried Titan in the heart,
Whose strength, the vastness of forgotten life,
Suffers but is not dead;
Tune stirs him as no thought of ours, or aught
Mere comprehension grasps, can him disquiet,"
She, the bird pausing, said.
Then he once more renewed
That vocal ebullition of his soul.

The moon had risen ere we reached my hearth,
Where I set forth a meal of curds and whey,
Bright water and dry bread.

MENALCAS

Come in, I can prepare a better feast!

EUCRITOS

The weight of memory oppresseth me...
Now thou shalt hear or never. O Menalcas,
When we had eaten it was I who talked..

Alas, I fear, not well, wasting rare hours,
Preyed on by a glib fever.

MENALCAS It was but fitting.

Women must always listen while men woo;
Man, once they have been won.

And the male patience bears the sorer trial:
Absence and death alone afford him refuge,
But she need only yield to quiet us.

EUCRITOS I shall go home, Menalcas: Life's dried figs
And raisins may stave hunger off, but they
Disgust when introduced among fresh fruit.

An adage, aye, an adage, priceless wisdom..
Yet every wrinkled face can belch an hundred
Without having wisely lived a single day.

MENALCAS

Forgive me, Eucritos. Come, renew thy spell,
It held me tranced. My heart is parched for more.

EUCRITOS Words can hide thought.

MENALCAS

Mine undress kind truth. Lead, for I follow,
Leaving behind that pedlar's pack, experience.
I will sleep waking and indeed regret
Ever to have been shaken out of youth.

EUCRITOS "I give thee tryst," she said at point of day,
"Where those who visit the Hesperides

Must beach their prows; and hope to show thee there

A small girl-nymph, thy daughter: or my son
Confide unto his hero-father's care

That thou mayst train him to be worthy me."

Straight in a vision I, the while she spake,

Saw children playing naked on fair sands

When all their glee was hushed by a dark fear,

(For, ship-wrecked, I was landing where they stood.

They fled, I followed: and in a cave beheld

'Mid other nymphs with smaller babes, my spouse.)

Wherat I wept for that prospected bliss:

And she, grown loth to part from me, then promised
To come again at evening from the sea.
Preferred before the Tritons! favoured as gods are!
I think I tried to milk the goat last milked
Instead of those loud bleating for relief;
'Tis like I slept upright beside the stack,
Shouldered my fork without the truss of fodder
I went to fetch. Meseemed the day had passed
As we perceive that centuries have glided;
Yet cannot guess one hundred-thousandth part
Of what marked them important for the dead.
I know the adorable evening, softly flushed,
Found me upon the shore with dancing feet
And hands that clasped themselves above my head,
Then grasped these ribs as they would rend them open
And cool my heart in that delicious sea.
From afar between two islets
(Though still inaudible,
Compelling an ecstatic supposition,
Torturing and tantalizing hearing,
Delivering Hope from Panic's fevered arms
Till she escaped and ran
White naked Certainty
On to my bosom,)
A song,
My nymph's song,
Came to me;
Came through the fainted
Hush of heat-cloyed air;
Above
The sighed reviving of its breathing,
The wide bay's liquid murmur,
Lapping of near ripples;
Above
The thudding of my pulses;
That dear approach

Of nimble trills
With lucky well-timed pauses
Drew me out swimming
Till last her dripping face met mine in laughter.

All is well, Menalcas, all is well;
But I have no words left
And yearn to be alone.
Only mark this:
The Gods themselves did fight at Salamis;
Pallas Athene loves and honours sailors;
Like those long polished lanes
That cross the ocean between changing winds,
Direct the course that she inspires;
There is no place for skulking on the sea.
Let thieves and cozeners hug the shore;
Let them not trust that heavy cloak of rain,
That veil of mist, that wall of fog..
These rise, these lift, are winged capricious things,
Will neither shield your merchant nor your pirate.
On land roads up and down and crook and turn,
Are masked by trees and foul with mud. There
Let robber and huckster lurk and dodge and quarrel!
MENALCAS

And yet those truthful Persians were defeated,
Who sailed straight on and used no strategy!

EUCRITOS Ha, ha, I see them founder!

Self-constituted rivals of the sun,
Their suzerainty must be wide as his:

And having bragged, they bided by it moveless;
This was their lie.

An insult to all gods whose eyes behold
Not only what we see, but things to come,
Things vanished, things remote,
And all the invisible.

With emblematical rods

These landsmen thrashed the sea;
With emblematical chains
Had manacled Poseidon's element,
Belying their scant human nature,
Pretending inbred power:
No falseness else is comparable with theirs!

Look on this cutlass' edge
Long enough from tip to hilt!
From cradle to grave
Such and so fine division cleaves
The quite lost from the sheer unknown.
Parting with her I found it keen:
Two perfect nights fell on one side
And *now* was *now without her*. On
The other side wild-picturing Hope
Could no more stretch a hand than through
A cliff of adamant.
This easeful hour divides our lives
As cleanly as that crisis:
To those alert each moment's critical.
For while men foot this razor's edge of Time
Their actions take two only shapes ..
One happiness, the other misery;
And both are met in danger, both in peace.

Mark: trireme, tartan, boat and skiff
Epitomize state, household, friendship, health.
As heroes in them man should always bear him.
Each present moment skims
Those vast unsounded deeps
Which isolate life's hazardous intent.
No more than boatswain dare remove a plank
And peer down through her bottom at strange fish,
Can man cut trap into that vast reserve
Of strong withheld contrivance. Here we ride

Ignoring all; its means, its goal, its character,
Its origin; what service, if it serve,
It render; to what purpose? in what mind?
Or whether lives be ripples to some wind,
Or whether thought reflected from their tilt
Distort Hyperion wisdom. Man has built
Polities, laws, customs, disciplines,
Whose shapeliness with admiration wins
Perpetuation and improvement too,
Even as of hull curves those best-planned are new.
Hence Pallas holds in her mind's eye for ever
Sea-craft and all who handle them like masters.

MENALCAS

There's a fine gush of notions!

MENALCAS

How came they in the talk of whispering lovers?
I looked for raving over a nymph's love skill.

EUCRITOS

We even forgot our joys in admiration ...

Sea-battles she had shared in!

EUCRITOS

Not from Eleusis and the Acropolis only
Came invisible aid,

But Ocean helped those Greeks.

She whom mine arms have folded

Sat on the sea-floor underneath our fleet,

Bowed with anxiety, brow pressed on knees,

Hair serpenting round feet, until her pha-

Detached itself and gained the air above:

Where, stoled in finer tissue than Arach-

In semblance of a haughty queen of e

It, despite broad day v

Who hesitated to attack their foe:
“How long will ye backwater?”
The captains answered with one loud “Advance!”
And right against the Persian flank sped out:
Crashing upon those brittle tiers of sweeps
Rammed larboard his slow over-crowded hulls,
And, of his compact files of glittering ships,
Dividing them, made two disordered mobs:
While she,
Recovering natural sight, beheld our shadows
Like those of clouds which scour a windy plain
Scud from behind before
Over the sand and sea-wrack.
And as they distanced,
Raising her late-tranced eyes,
Might watch their black keels flock, enormous eagles,
Three hundred banded, each behaloed round
And streamered with its coruscating foam,
On toward that larger green-beclouding phalanx..
Become confused with it.
Then, then as feathers fall
When osprey attacks heron,
Slain men as slowly,
Though weighted with much armour,
Turned, twirled like down in air.
Thus in that Persian autumn
The fall of men began:
As dead bird leaf-resisted
Shot on tall plane-tree’s top,
Down, never truly stopping,
Through green translucence dropping,
They often seemed to stop.

MENALCAS
EUCRITOS

Did she so chant?

At best my voice remembers hers but ill.
All, all drifts from me like disabled ship,

Cumbered with dead and dying, who mend not
Hacked rigging and caulk not those thirsty leaks.

MENALCAS Songs of unusual lilt
Are hardest to recall.

EUCRITOS

Death gnaws within man both at mind and heart
Till he have leave to batten on the rest.

MENALCAS

Shake off these thoughts; thou hast not one white hair.

EUCRITOS

Though age be nearer thee, can any know
How nigh death lurk? She put these thoughts to me,
And urged me act, suffer, and be used.

What long and indefatigable days
Swallows pass on the wing!

Listlessness is not peace..

Peace is for quite clean bones: they have it now,
Though in their homes at cruel gods they fretted,
Those haters of the sea.

MENALCAS

Salt water breedeth gods are none too gentle.

EUCRITOS Blaspheme not thou, Menalcas, or I slay
The Greek whose ears have heard all I have told
Without a seaward-grateful heart.

MENALCAS

Come, sheathe that cutlass, lad; I'll not blaspheme,
But honour even my roughest friends and patrons.

EUCRITOS

I faint! Recounting her grand talk devours
My heart and sucks my veins. Let's eat, Menalcas.

MENALCAS

Yea, lad, and drink; I have a skin of wine.

EUCRITOS

And I, Menalcas, thirst for the whole sea.

III. THE BARGAINERS

MENALCAS [to his dog]

Where is he, Lion? Quiet! Wouldst fright his sleep?

EUCRITOS I was awake.

MENALCAS I'm glad;

Slumber so rich as thine 'twere ill to break.

EUCRITOS Slight not the fortune of a luckier man;
Thou know'st it at all points not like a dream.

MENALCAS

The lucky man, indeed, that can lie here,
While I must fold my flock and milk mine ewes.

EUCRITOS Thou wouldst none of my help.

MENALCAS Goats can wait longer.

EUCRITOS Lampas had charge to tend them.

MENALCAS

Hast filled a nap kissing air? or, soft-eyed,
Smiled while the first star brightened?

EUCRITOS

Menalcas, sell thy sheep and join with me
To buy a tartan with broad-striped lateen.

MENALCAS

I've thought of it.

EUCRITOS Fortunes are made at sea.

MENALCAS And lost.

EUCRITOS Not ours; we shall be favoured.

MENALCAS

Lad, that's not sure... But I'm agog to hear
Yet more about those nights of nymph-hugging.

EUCRITOS First promise to go partners in a ship.

MENALCAS

Steady! that needs maturely pondering on.

EUCRITOS A cargo sold oft double-pays its cost:
We soon might run a larger craft and hire
A crew.

MENALCAS

The more we have the more we risk.

EUCRITOS

"The sea is kind."

MENALCAS Are shark and tempest kind?

EUCRITOS Thou knowest Diocles' song of Danaë.

MENALCAS No, but sing it; for any song of his
I'll warrant meet to flush thy memory
With recollection of those midnight hours.

EUCRITOS [chanting]

"There is no kindlier cradle for your mood,
Young lovers dear, than open boat at large;
Dream the girl mother and her babe there; brood
O'er Danaë, the wide sea's delicate charge.

Think, all the boat she had was just a chest,
While all her sail spread but to let breeze through,
(Being long flapping hair); and all her crew
That babe who nuzzled at her domèd breast;

Her only sweeps, arms trimly turned and bladed
With playful tender hands; never a rope,
Never a mast which through the gale should slope
In eager haste. Her never pilot aided,

Yet she thrid shoals, did tack and foil the wind.
Mere beauty was her cargo, not for sale,
None 'neath tarpaulin stowed, none in a bale,
But all on deck: and was not the sea kind?"

MENALCAS

Boy, thou art bent on searching quayless gulfs
For thy love-child and its bewitching dam,
And pine thou wouldst to ply where profit teems
From bustling port to port.

EUCRITOS There's time for both;
At least a dozen years in careful traffic
Must fit me out.

MENALCAS

Was thy nymph never playful in thine arms?

EUCRITOS

Thou shouldst be rich before we burnt our bond.

MENALCAS

Let that bide. Come! Thy nymph?

EUCRITOS I can but wait

Sign from her, since our son could not be ripe
To rough it aboard ship, younger than twelve.

MENALCAS

'Twas very strange never to ask her name.

EUCRITOS I'll tell it thee, if but thou wilt go partners.

MENALCAS

Ho, ho! thou saidst thou hadst not asked it?

EUCRITOS She told it though.

MENALCAS What was it then?

EUCRITOS Thou thinkst in solid truth of a sea-life?

MENALCAS

I've half a mind to spend my summers sailing.

EUCRITOS Wilt venture on sea-traffic all we have?

MENALCAS

Let's reckon up our means.—Hush, Lion.—Who
Strays hither after dark?

FEMALE VOICE WITHOUT

Menalcas!

MENALCAS Proto?

[as a woman comes through the dusk]

What time of day next, lass?

PROTO

Menalcas, neighbour Myrson is persuaded;
Says, though he owed my husband a shrewd grudge,
He could not wish him worse than just stone dead,
And his wife married to a man like thee.

His gain chimes in with ours

As I was sure it did.

In short, thou'l have the five fields at thine offer

All save the west-most strip;

And as to-morrow is the three months' market...

MENALCAS I will not sleep to-night.
At dawn my sheep shall cross the dim agora...
—Eucritos, this decides me:
We've had a mind for one bed these three years,
But the Gods frowned. Her land outyields mine tenfold,
Yet lies too distant to be worked as one.
Now all is easy as kiss my hand: I sell,
And join my having, field by field, to hers,
Making a grand farm of it.
Sorry, my lad, but look!
But see! this quean never melts into air!
There's a plump arm!

PROTO The moon rises: walk with me to the lane;
I've left the mule cart under Battos' charge,
And must be home ere day.

MENALCAS Eucritos, farewell:
Good dreams console thee.—Proto, his arms at night
So crave employment that he is convinced
A sea nymph visits him.

PROTO [as she and Menalcas move away through
the darkness]
Manners, Menalcas! we are not spousèd yet.

EUCRITOS [rousing himself]
I knew his heart was clay when first he hailed me:
—Evarne, pardon me these wasted hours.
[Turning away]
Yon seas house many a nymph,—Zeus, let one be
A happy, ever happier, mother by me.
Those waters heave and swell
And many a tale to their countless hearers tell;
Zeus, may they use for me their grandest tone,
And mean, whenever they moan,
That courage, effort and health
Are more than life and more than wealth.

THE ROUT OF THE AMAZONS
TO MY MOTHER

At Laomedon's Upper Fold.

FAUN [afar off] Ahi, ahi, ahi, Laomedon!

LAOMEDON It is the faun: he is in sore dismay:
That shrewd "Ah ee" denoteth grief or pain.

FAUN [nearing] Ahi, ahi, ahi!

LAOMEDON Ah! there he comes!

What bounds!—O Hermes, how he bounds along!
Like to a frog which boys do pelt with stones,
But straighter, without pause: and every leap
Cleareth a rood or more!.. He's o'er the stream,
And takes the hurdles of the fold with ease,
And comes, and comes ...

FAUN Ahi, ahi, ahi!

LAOMEDON

Heyday, heyday! what fills thee with alarm?

FAUN Ahi!

LAOMEDON Take breath, O ægipan, take breath.

FAUN Ahi! Laomedon, art thou alone?

LAOMEDON

Yea, yea; see, here's a bowl; I'll pour thee out
A draught of milk.

FAUN Nay, stay: thou art alone?

LAOMEDON

Alone I am, and shall be yet awhile:
My wife and daughters have gone off to bathe;
The heat had wearied them, and, ere sun-down,
They wended slowly by yon zig-zag path,
So through the valley wood, on by the stream,
To gain the shore, where, floored with sand, a trough
Between flat shelves of rock doth form a bath
Convenient for their youth and timid hearts;
Yon sail, that twinkles on the far sea marge,
My boys have hoisted; having rowed out thither,
They now await the freshening breeze of night..
Behold, its first flaw travels the calm bay.

FAUN You love a sober speech and call it best;

Grave rounded syllables; but oh, give ear!
Ahi, ahi! my tale will not support
A measured speech;
It must come like the wind,
Gust upon gust,
With rapid sweeping,
Curve following curve,
Until the waves are tossing and can roar.

Oh, has the zephyr won thy heart to love,
With beauty daring all the other winds
To give him chase? or has
A child armed with a branch
Of silver-willow catkins,
Who dances round the men at work and laughs
His merry gibes?
Oh! it is worse
Than when it falls and hurts itself and weeps..
More suddenly ended and more utterly..
When the fair youthful woman,
Brandishing her spear,
Flaunting her cape of spotted leopard skin,
Prancing a white unsaddled horse
As full of bounding mettle as her glance is,
Gashed shrieks and wounded topples to the ground!
Ah! it is worse than when a lovely day is
In rushing storm englutted,
To see her dragged by one foot from the fight,
Amid the hooves whirled by a frantic steed,
Her head trailed through the dust, her poor bruised face
Like a down-beaten muddied flower, fainted..
Her white hands trodden upon,
Her white hands trodden upon.
What pain! alas, what pain!
LAOMEDON
What hast thou seen, ah me! that makes thee weep

That art not wont to weep? Thou cam'st so straight,
That com'st at other times so waywardly ..
Seeking the ferret's hole beneath the hedge,
Chasing the rabbit with a merry whoop,
Mocking the blue-tit swinging upside-down
With his 'chin chin,' thy fingers in thy teeth,
From lichenèd bole picking the mealy moth,
And prying into all creation's hopes.

What ails thee? hast thou seen a goddess fight?
For goddesses do fight among the gods,
Though men with women fight not on the earth.

FAUN Ahi, ahi, ahi! if they did not
I should be as I always am to-day,
But they put on short tunics
Scarce covering half their thighs;
The baldrick o'er their shoulders
And quivers they put on;
To the bow set foot and knee,
String it with twanging cord
And fit the notchèd shaft;
Javelin and spear take up;
And mount the steed and spur him, wearing straps
Wound round the heel and ankle, tightly wound;
They wheel and prance and canter,
And make him arch his neck,
Rear, and with delicate knees
Cling to his moistening flanks.
A thousand rode together, poising darts,
Behind them those with other arms came on;
All flaunting down a green-sward valley came
Between Arcadia's gentle holted hills.
It was for beauty like a fleet at sea,
Or like an hundred swans
Sailing before the breeze across a lake!
Their vests of daffodil, or pallid pink
Or milky violet! their saffron caps

And hoods like birds for sudden wing-like flaps !
Their white and piebald mounts ! the rich green sward,
The morning light, the blossoming hawthorn trees !
The zephyr's music in the holts that crown
With delicate fern-like trees, each soft knoll's top !
I thought the night had borne me heavenward
And in Olympus I had waked from sleep ;
And when their war-song rose
Long tears of rapture ran across my face :
Apollo made it, or, if 'twas not he,
Why, Marsyas died for nought.

Then heard I shouts, male voices,
And turning round I saw them come,
The men of Attica ;
With archers on the hills
In bands of twenty strong,
And horsemen in the plain,
And infantry drawn up in branching glens
Which sloped from either side down to the meads ;
I knew their stations had been ta'en with care ;
And soon the women would have turned the range,
And both those armies in each other's view
Must stand opposed.

In the boughs of an oak I have quaked, where four roads met,
To watch upon either hand draw near to the cross
A boy and a girl both lovely and light of foot,
With life escaping out of unhinding eyes ;
My heart has ached for fear that they should not laugh,
Not utter the kindly word when they met, but withstand
The power of either's beauty, and shame fac'd pass,
Fighting desire in their breasts for lack of a heart
Gallant with daring and sense ; my pulse has stood still.
But, for fearing the thing that those nearing armies

[might do,

When they met in the widening meads at the foot of the hill:
My blood it grew cold, so long a time it stood still.
For now a silence settled on both their hosts,
As a wistness fell on those children, when they heard,
Each unseen, the other's approaching step on the road;
For scouts had sighted and made to both sides report.
Ah, that hush was like a December night in my soul,
And dull the sound of the hooves as the dismal sound
In the winter forest that wakes one upon a thaw.

Ahi, ahi, ahi, it was shrewd pain!
And not with a radiant welcome and hearty laugh
Each fronted each; but with a shout like a curse,
With a yell that had stricken the lion's heart with fear,
They on to each other rushed.
Ah! the eyes, that saw it, bleed;
And my ear is a wounded sense!
These were men, that their terrible spears
Hurled at the female breast:
These were men, who the well-aimed arrow
Let fly in the eyes of a girl.

LAOMEDON

Faun, thou hast dreamed, this cannot be, is not;
I think I know enough this to deny.
Some bitter herb hast eaten and slept ill;
This has been born from fumes; some weed's rank sap
Deludes thee, Faun, there's wolf's-bane in thy blood!
Thou hast seen perchance in wild October night,
After the vintage, some the coarser hinds
Fight with their callets, and hast seen may be
Both wounds and blood dealt upon womankind;
Their clothes rent then, they by the hair were dragged:
They shrieked, they yelled, they tore with nails and teeth.
This in the fair spring night returned to thee..
The drunken riot, the hideous lustful rage
Transformed and tuned by trees above thy sleep.

There, with life-giving scent of May-time turf
And blossom's bounty floating the air of night,
Thy nostrils dilating, coloured thy dream has been
With delicate clarity; while agile forms,
Such as the Spring befit, rehearsed those crimes
With which the Autumn rude thy soul had laden:
For know, the gently reared have gentle hearts.

FAUN Nay, this was no dream, not at all!
Oh, believe me! for I have plucked no berries,
Have eaten no spotted leaf nor any tongue-shaped
(Like the adder's tongue, so shaped, so venomous)
Nor none with prickles touched; the wholesome alone
Have made my salads, and I am not deceived;
It was there, I can show thee the place, and lead thee
thither:

Nor these were not country wenches,
Nor did them resemble as dreams resemble
The world and men and gods;
These were the make of princesses, as thou hast told me:
And tended flowers that stand thy house before
Over the weed in the ditch bear not the palm
So far as these o'er some rich herdsman's child,
When, beauty ripe, she wears her very best;
For splendid purposes had these been trained,
And had the aspect of untiared queens;
Were like the tears of the morning for freshness;
Like the arms of the evening thrown up for weariness
Such was the radiance of their arms .. but thrown up,
Oh! thrown up in fright, in terror thrown up,
Those lovely and blood-splashed arms!

I was not on fire for them; think it not of me!
I viewed them not as our wild faunesses; no,
Though I have chased a nymph,
It was not so to-day;
I was sadder than a man to-day.

I will pray Pan fervently
That he may inspire me
With a ditty expressive of that mood
Whose sorrow was richer than joy.

He will do it,
For he is a sad god at his hours;
In the evening he is sad...
Very often.

LAOMEDON

The men fought them, thou sayest? lanced them with spears?
Had they no pity then, seeing them bleed?
Surely their hearts were touched then, they stayed then?
The dreadful and upraised sword
Was stayed then, was dropped then? and they
Ran to those they had wounded, lifted them, helped them,
And were at once most gentle with their hands?

FAUN No! nothing of that; for these,
Though they were hurt, were terrible;
Though they bled, they hated;
Though they died, they did not shed tears:
Their knees and arms were unstrung,
But their hearts were not.

Overthrown and puddled round with blood,
They struck at those who approached;
It was not safe to be merciful:
Though of those men some felt pity,
None showed it and lived.

It were better to have been a horse in that battle;
The strong steed knew not
Where he planted his hoof;
He ruined bosoms
That should have suckled heroes,
The children of a god;
But he knew it not.
If he broke the thigh of beauty,
Or crushed the loins

That had sate him so firmly,
With such elegance as the moon has,
The moon that rides white clouds,
Or the sea nymph whom a dolphin
Bears with pride as with pride he bare her.
This the dumb steed knew not;
But they, the men,
Knew what they did.

Look you,
To destroy beauty
Is what the year doth; the flower
Springs up in tenderness,
Is reared in elegance,
Sometimes to majesty,
But withered it giveth no more delight to the eye
Than an old creased ragged dusty kerchief!
Behold,
The storm it ravageth the sweet season;
Is it not then the fairest trees that suffer most?
What is the sea when tempest belloweth?
Not that wooer which erewhile
The youth, nay even
The maiden could not withstand;
But must be naked
And, bathing, intimately know
The caress of living waters?
A horse is very much as a wind..
It raceth, it is spurred, it becometh wild,
And in madness it rageth;
It hath the form of speed as wind hath the sound;
It forgetteth itself in everything it doth.

Needs must be that beauty perish,
A brief thing everywhere beneath the stars;
If it be otherwise among them,
None will wonder when it is known:

But here we see it short-lived;
Yet is Spring as constant as the fall,
The bud as sear'd petal sure
Despite both storm and frost;
And in despite
Of the terrible hooves of the horse
The female child
Shall be born and reared in beauty,
And ride and curb the steed
With the grace of those;
But the men who saw them
Shall not see these,
Or if they see them
Be old and chill,
Dull, and of no mettle to enjoy:
And this those men,
Destroying that beauty, knew.
Ah, and they know
More clearly yet by now!

LAOMEDON

Indeed, indeed, O Faun, thy words are wise;
Such truth as ne'er before sits on thy lips:
This is the pain of thought, and our soul's goad,
This is the spur of man, and sad he is;
To the child alone Spring comes with capturing glee;
Only to youth with sweet co-ordinate soul,
And powers akin to theirs, will like their own;
The man mature is braced to undertake
What, the last Autumn, had been judged too hard;
For him the Spring has come like self restored.
To age but as reprieve from pain it comes:
The laughing face throws on them some faint smile,
As from a shield the pale round lights a wall
Shed by its brilliant blaze; but oftenest, ah!
The envy of sour impotence is theirs,
Or dull regret, for they cannot be cheered,

Nor can they bless the kindness that would cheer;
Then o'er the grave Spring treads unheeded quite.

FAUN Give me the milk, Laomedon; I thirst.

Thanks. Ah! the milk is good,

As sweet it seems to me

As in those lovely bosoms there was stored

For infants that shall never wail for it.

They broke, they broke, and scattered far and wide,

Even so suddenly as I have seen

The cherry tree almost to one sole gust

Give up its bloom.

Like petals in the breeze, like butterflies,

They headed for the hills,

For shelter with loose rein

On all sides fleeing!

As when among the sheep

A young dog wantonly, that has not learned

To gather in the flock on Helicon,

And make a white drift like late-lingering snows

Among the rocks and cactus of a glen..

As when such young cur wantonly will bark

And run and worry; as then fly the sheep

In headlong terror, so those fair queens fled.

But no Apollo from the clear sweet sky

Hastened, as then sore-vexed the shepherd hastens

To stay the cur with swift correcting stone,

And gather-to the sheep with sager dogs...

Ah no, ah no, Apollo!

Apollo, where wast thou?

Afar on white Olympus' brow?

Or didst thou some fair Daphne follow?

Or wast thou minding sheep

For some boy shepherd's love

Upon Thessalian steep?..

While in thy car above

A Phaëton, a mortal's child,

The reins had from thy hand beguiled,
With silly pride to drive his father's team,
Heedless of evils, flush-faced, in a dream ..
Cheeks flushed, curls streaming,
Rapt standing in thy car,
In daylight dreaming;
Blissful as sleepers are,
Heedless of evils be they near or far,
Of evils heedless be they near or far ...
But close, close, close to me
A feminine splendour on a whirlwind steed
Rushed up, flashed forth, passed by,
Plunging through the crashing brakes
Deep between trees, on, on :
And others.. I could hear them broach the wood
At diverse distances;
Some with shrewd wails of pain
For jolted wound, or blow from low-hung bough :
So turned and hastened towards the wooded hills,
Leaving the open valley and the meads
And the harsh voices of victorious men ;
And, following tracks some hour, came upon
A stream, and, by the stream
One crouched, half stripped, wiping a wounded foot.
Her bare arms, shaped as dreams of courage are
In some young lover's mind,
Glowed bright with strength, efficiency, and grace:
The woundless foot bespoke a power to dance,
To race, to wheel, and leap,
As tunny's tail expresseth subtler force
And water-quelling feats of deftness rare.
Behind, into an oak bush leaned her shield
And her long spear: her face
Was strange and sweet as when the spell of thought
Lays hold upon a child,
Who feels no captive yet,

And, when he shall, that instant will escape:
Her hair, a nut-red, hung
Unnetted down her back;
Some vests on which she sate dipped in the stream,
And in the water dipped
One of her silvery greaves
Shapely and curved:
Not far away her horse,
Where the bank widened and the sunshine fell,
Lay panting with green branches strewn o'er him,
Green branches she had first drenched in the stream.
Then, as she staunched her wound,
Her shift fell open and I saw her breast
Quick heaving still:
The flowers that grow upon that lush stream-bank,
Fed with green half-veiled light
Or short half-hours of sun,
Deep in the wood,
No wind could reach to stir; but like some belled
Faint-flushed anemone
Wherein a bee is hid
Her bosom shook...
I shall not speak about her loveliness
Beyond what now is said:
She never saw me and I left her there.
Soon I on traces came of wildest flight:
The white and spunky end of some dead branch
Snapt on the ground.. the wounded toadstool clump
Scattered in chips of sulphur or shrewd red..
Rent and dragged tangle, briar, clematis,
Or woodbine.. clotted leaves scooped up, turned over;
Black, moist, and glistening on the dusty mats,
They form where'er the gloom forbiddeth weeds;
Last, ploughed-up dints in ruddier needles led me
On to a hill-side plateau: mid the pines
Through which a glade was opened o'er the land,

A shred of silk there fluttered 'gainst the sky.

At foot of tall and grandly-towering pines
Was where she fell; for there she dead lay fallen,
Between two groves of grandly-towering pines.
Yea, here she fell; for here she dead lay fallen
With both arms stretched beyond her upturned face,
Pointing the way her steed had madly fled;
Her feet, where their wake ended in dank grass
Through which they had been trailed some thirty yards,
Lying wound in their straps and scored with scratches;
A spotted skin belting the tattered vests
That chilly shook upon her loins, or framing
A globed discovered breast and firm full throat:
Perfectly still: and in her raven hair
Nested her face like snow on cypress cradled,
While near one hand a yellow daffodil
With unbruised stalk flaunted its winsome head.
There, while I gazed upon her, I could see
The quiet country melt in haze away
Miles beyond miles. There beautiful she lay,
The tall pines barely murmuring far aloft,
Not stooping and not conscious she was there:
Yet once I saw the ripe and rustling corn
Arch down above a baby sleeping naked;
Tender and careful as Demeter was
Of her Persephone at eighteen months,
So fond the wheat bowed o'er that baby lying
Not far from where men reaped between two fields
Upon a patch of close-grown clover leaves.
A pitcher in a wattled jacket cased,
And food tied with a napkin, stood beside
Its curly flaxen poll; the patterned shawl,
Which once had wrapped it, 'neath its legs lay crumpled,
For great the warmth and sturdy those fine limbs.
There, under curving heavy-fruited stalks,

And nodding ears of dry and rustling corn,
Between those fields outspread like oceans rolling,
The two-years-old slept sound; and I, who heard
The reapers sing the contest and defeat
Of Linus, to give time to their hard toil,
Might watch her grace in slumber half an hour,
And wonder whether she had dreams or no.
It was a child, whose prettiness in play
Might well have charmed the bird down from the tree:
I, gazing on that dead form, thought of her,
And felt as then I felt, and stole away,
As though a-feared lest she might wake, and scream
To see my horns, brown visage, and white teeth.

LAOMEDON

Meseems that these must have been amazons.
Beyond the isles that live, beyond the isles;
I have heard tell (but ne'er did credit much)
Of their strange way of life and warlike strength:
And yet, since that thy tongue seems new-endowed,
Perchance thou art inspired of a god
And speakest things that are not, to win love..
To win love hinting grandeurs not contained
In what contains us, air and sight and sound;
For that they should invade our Hellas seems
In very sooth a dream.

FAUN No, no! no dream!
Not far from where that lovely warrior lay
I sate me down in deep and solemn mood,
Then came a bird and sang..
Sang and flew off once more;
A squirrel came and wondered what it meant;
The nimble rogue had hoped I'd give him chase.
He knew not she lay there in middle glade
Dead, yet as beautiful as hope of health
After one has been sick. And it grew cold,
And the damp spring-tide evening settled in;

Between the tall sad trunks the light grew grey,
And green gave place to blackness in the grass:
With strident cries at times, but ne'er a song,
The birds had gone to roost; and silence reigned
Like the great future, absolute control
Exerting without any sensible sign..
Lord of an hour, as that great realm of hope
Imposeth all life long. Mutely I prayed
That she to joy might even yet return,
Then looked and saw the stars shine through the boughs,
And far away I heard a silver sound.
At first methought it was the rising moon
Did make a music pure and clear as dew;
But, lo! 'twas answered from the west, and soon
Out of the south was gently born again.
I did not move, but mine eyes filled with tears;
And now from many quarters all at once,
And then again in silver dialogue,
Across the inlets of the sea,
Across the plains,
Across successive ranges of the hills,
Fainter than music, more magical than harps,
It rose and was approaching from all sides;
I rocked myself for bliss.. a hallali,
A hallali on horns of crystal sounded.
The nymphs of Artemis they blew those horns
On all the hills, in every forest's heart,
And down the valleys, and across the plains,
And near the distant inlets of the sea,
Where'er a woman's body they had found.
Now close behind me, twenty paces back,
It sounded: and I, turning, saw one stand
With all the dignity and charm of night,
In a white tunic with a grey-green cloak,
Beside that prostrate sister of like grace.
Then knelt she and laid both the arms to rest,

Next straightened both the knees, and closed the shift
Above the breast, ordered the dew-damp hair,
And kissed the eyelids, having lowered them;
Went then and gathered young ferns not far off;
With these she covered up that lovely corse,
Then drew a circle round it with an arrow,
Saying some words of heaven .. some rare spell,
Doubtless of might to stay
The onward rushing wolf, and yet so fine
That it could hold the spider and the ant,
Forbid their entrance like a crystal wall,
And owl or chough or vulture on the wing
Suddenly turn to folly, and their instinct,
Never at fault before, lead far astray,
As though their hearts felt love, and they were gone
To vainly haunt round some fair rock-nymph's lodge,
Or to persuade the moon with lover's sighs.
Sounding again that glory on her horn,
She turned and passed away among the trees.
Soon I arose and sought the freer air
And gazed out o'er the night; and here and there,
Lo! a white tunic and a green-grey cloak
Of fainter than a phosphor radiance, gleamed
Upon the plain, or on the sides of hills.
Ere long I knew they gathered toward that place
(Winding their horns at times, the while they went)
Where the main battle raged; and I made thither.
But, when I saw
How many queens were busy on that field,
And with what rapid gliding steps they moved,
Fear fell upon me lest I were surprised,
Actaeon-like, and changed to more a beast,
Losing both speech and laughter ... so I fled
Just as the morning was about to break.
An hundred miles have I come straight to thee,
Mine only friend, Laomedon; and now

Haste thee, O shepherd, to return with me;
For though they doubtless buried some last night,
And will to-night inter yet more, I deem
It shall be full a week ere that they quit
Their travail o'er Arcadian hills and dales:
So come, for we may see them at their work
And in our hearts put by so pure a vision,
That though old age and blindness fall on us,
We shall know hours of rapture to the end.

LAOMEDON

O Faun, I do believe thee, and will come;
For what thou tell'st is worthy of the gods,
And holy Artemis would act e'en so.
First let me say farewell unto my wife
And daughters, for I hear them at the house.
They have returned and shall provide a scrip
With cates and meat, figs and good flask of wine;
For thou hast fasted long, and several days
Must pass before I can be here once more.

FAUN Laomedon, I will await thee; haste!
—So good a man both gods and nymphs respect;
I shall be safe with him. The poor wild faun,
With that kind shepherd who once saved his life,
Shall look upon the holy Artemis
And all her stately and white-tunic'd nymphs.
A man walks slow, our journey will take time.
But, see, he doth return; his wife and girls,
Who take their leave, come with him; I will hide.

DAUGHTER

O father, wilt thou go an hundred miles?

LAOMEDON Eudora, yea; an hundred miles, my girl.

HIS WIFE Laomedon, be heedful and not rash;
Anger no nymph, intrude not on their rites!

LAOMEDON Dear, fear me not; farewell.

LITTLE DAUGHTER

An hundred miles is further than the caves?

ELDEST DAUGHTER

Yes, Doto, for the caves are scarce ten miles.

LAOMEDON

Farewell, my sweetest little one, farewell;
Oh, I could kiss you all away to-night!

ANOTHER DAUGHTER

There is the faun; I saw him; mother, mother!

THE WIFE

He will not hurt you, dear; 'tis a kind faun.

EUDORA Father, I cannot think an hundred miles:
It is beyond beyond, too far, and like
The moon and stars; or are they nearer us?

LAOMEDON

Further, I think, but ask the reremice that;
Farewell, be good.—Dear wife, one last farewell!

ALL

Farewell, farewell; good-bye, good-bye!

FAUN Hist!

I to the hay rick on yon ridge will pass
And there await thee; I can not walk slow.

LAOMEDON

Good, good; agreed!—Ha, ha! see, he is off;
My best strides are no match for bounds like that;
—Didst thou see, Doto, how he leaped i' the dark?

DOTO Ha, ha, the funny faun!

LAOMEDON Good-bye, sweet one.

ALL Father, good-bye!

EUDORA The darkness down the hill
Hides him so fast, he seems a shadow now
That waves its hand upon a dark grey wall.

THE MOTHER

There, let us all go home and get to bed;
The boys will not be back till near on dawn;
I hope they will bring fish, for all the meat
Did I thrust in his wallet, wrapped in leaves.
If it be wise to try and see the gods

I know not; but your Father is a man,
And men will not be cautious in such things;
So let us get to bed and pray for him.

THE CENTAUR'S BOOTY
TO C.S.R. AFFECTIONATELY

On one that stands out above a waste of boulders, the old Centaur, PHOLUS, lies gazing forth into the deepening twilight; at last, having sighed, he speaks: Black my thoughts are, black the hills and mountains, Ocean a sombre grey, And the sky darkens.

There! lights are there; yea, torch-light flashes, Travelling the wide way
Forth from yon city:

Men shake them.. ah! the crowd pursues him:
Wildly they glance and flare
By mob rage shaken;
They stop, collect.. ah, ah, an hundred!
Two! out-numbered, there,
He must be taken.

They slay him, slay my friend, my brother;
He bleeds there.. faints there.. dies..
Even now his throes are bitter.

I of centaurs am the last then;
Why should I longer live?
To die were fitter;
Never shall mine eyes behold
What soothed my father's gaze when his grew old;

Never watch young bodies that renew
The pleasant memories of mine early years

Doing now all that I then would do;

With what zest such youth careers
Merely for the sake of speed!

They wrestle (being more and other
Than noblest man, than grandest steed)
Each one with his twofold brother.

Ah, to be last of centaurs living!

No young ones gallop on the hills;
Nor can I bring, in hopes of giving
Due chastisement to yonder town,
With noise as when a torrent fills,

A tide of hooves that thunder down
Wrath from the Thracian hills.

—Avert thy death I cannot,
Medon, my friend;
Helpless, I even plan not
Thy foes to end;
Nor will I shed a tear,
Who still have known
How vain hope would appear
When truth was known;
We were not born to grow
And gather sway
But to a weakling foe
To yield each day;
Since numbers and not worth
The Gods decree
Shall rule and foul the earth,
What is, must be.

[He remains silent, gazing forth into the deep night until the sound of hooves is heard in the distance, when he raises his head and moans]

Oh, that mine ears had lost their hearing!
Or that my heart were strong enough
To ban new hopes! yea, they are nearing;
It cannot be a mere wild horse,
They are too steady in their fall;
A man might scarcely ride at all
On such a night, not hold his course
With constant careful purposed speed;
It is, oh! it must be, of need,
Medon, my only friend and brother.

[A VOICE rises some distance away]

Medon am I, and no other.

PHOLUS

Hail! art thou wounded? stay thou there, I come:
Oh, clamber not upon these boulders, friend,

To jar thy wound! I shall soon be with thee.
That burden in thine arms can be no girl;
It is too small.

MEDON No wound have I, nor have
I rapt a woman hither; 'tis a child,
A boy.

PHOLUS Of what use to us is a child?

MEDON

He sleeps; he struggled, bit, roared, howled, at length
He wept himself to sleep: behold these limbs,
Sturdy, well-knit!... Would that there were more light
And thou should'st see a child as brave for health
And strength, as violent and full of passion...
Despite his two legs, 'tis a centaur nature.

PHOLUS

Women sometimes bear better than they would.

MEDON

When the moon rises, those thy words will seem
Far truer than thou thinkest yet; O Pholus,
All that thou said'st before I left thee, worked
And struggled in my brain, and when I came
Among the farms, and saw them as thou said'st...
The first I saw was like a singing flower;
As though a tall pale blossom had a voice
She in a little coppice stood for shade,
Her distaff in one hand, while with the other
She twirled the spindle slowly towards the ground
And looked up singing, like an open flower:
I saw her weakness in her beauty strong;
And knew she loved herself, frail though she was,
And felt she must be worse than wine to me;
Then, far within, I heard thy words like stones
That drop down through an empty quarry's womb
Slow ring.. "For vain it is that they pretend
That either gods have joy or fate ensures
To crown this virtue born of women's dreams,

This worship of the weak which they call pity:
Nothing is pitied of the gods and fate.”
Oh! as when one has swum too wide a lake
And faint, exhausted, strikes the beach at last,
With hooves that scarce may stead him.. so, to me
Who had been battling with a subtler flood,
Came, like a fresh breeze to a poppied dell
“Nothing is pitied of the gods and fate.”
Could I have dreamed Apollo might be kind,
Or Zeus think of me, or Fate hear my prayer;
I had not turned and fled her as I did,
I had not felt so young and glad as that.

PHOLUS

I was concerned thou shouldst so dream of women,
Since that thy fair Hippoноë was dead;
Thou leftst me very heavy when thou wentest
To snatch a woman from the lowlands yonder,
And mock thy widowed heart with human love.

MEDON

All thou hadst said went with me and was strong:
Besides, I always carry in my mind
My dead Hippoноë;
The place I found her in,
An arrow through her neck,
Another lodged deep in her ripening womb;
I found her, where they left her, in her blood;
I laid the mountain goat’s kid I had brought
Upon her hair; upon her raven hair
The white new-strangled kid we should have dressed
And eaten of together;
Both were dead;
I buried both within a single grave:
Besides thy words .. her brown arms, the white kid
Between them laid upon her thick black hair;
The patch of blood-stained grass
Mid the bright grass still green that grew all round..

Besides thy words I had this vision with me,
So felt we were the last of all our race;
If one of the two last became the slave
Of a slight blossom with a female voice,
Which by some witch-craft Circe bade to grow
In a sun-chequered woodland coppice, there
To sing until a centaur came that way
And knelt him down to worship day and night,
Letting his strength leak out at eyes and ears,
While only Pholus, saddened with old age,
Lived as the noble centaurs lived of old
Whose fame redounded to their native hills.

PHOLUS I can remember still an ancient centaur
Who by a nymph was won away from us ..
Though he had had a wife, would he have fought;
For then were many females of our race
And none, who owned his strength, need have lived lone:
But a white nymph there dwelt among the rocks,
And, while she lay before him, he would kneel
And pore upon her eyes;
She was not as a woman who grows old,
Loses her charm and frees those whom she snared:
Nay, till he died her beauty held him fast;
No joy he knew, no change, but, in a trance
He gazed upon her snowy languid form,
And sought he knew not what within her eyes.

MEDON I thought of him; for thou, long years ago,
Hadst spoken sadly of his wasted life,
And how his death was like a blasted tree's
Ragged with dead moss, whitened with crumbling tinder,
Gnarled, writhen, old, patient and desolate.
For she, she left him as the white owl quits
The old stump ere it fall; she left him young,
Dreamy and calm as she had been before
He found her like a sleeping water there,
A mirror visited by all the stars

And which at noon-day seems a golden shield
Dropped by a Titan mid the rocks he hurled,
Or which, hurled at him, drove him wounded thence.
Some say the nymphs are women whom the gods
Have loved and given life to, ageless life,
And left each in the place where she was loved,
A memory to which they may return
And find a joy long past yet look like joy;
Each lovely spot still cradle of the form
Whose youth and beauty caused their sojourn in it;
The virgin they deflowered, virgin still;
Ah! fatal is that youth which is not young,
That purity which is no longer pure
But seems so; ah! how kind can beauty seem!

PHOLUS

'Tis like enough the gods are pleased with evil,
And thus pollute the beauty of the earth,
Hiding their wantonness as Spring cloaks Winter.
She false proclaims that death, decay and ruin
Exist not, while she really battens on them
In rash, triumphant lust and carelessness;
So women heed not what courageous life
They draw man from; the better, the more homage
They sip, the richer flavour soaks their dream!

MEDON

It may be so with some.

PHOLUS

With most it is.

MEDON

Not many have such beauty; if the Gods
Take some to make them nymphs, but few are left.

PHOLUS Enough; for it goes hard if once in life
A woman have not her brief hour of charm,
And find not some man weaker than her spell.

MEDON The next I saw were not so fair as flowers;
The thought of her I left within the wood
Made them seem noteless, common as their tasks.

And then I found the mother of this child :
She might have been a centauress half-hid
By plants of broom ; for shoulders, arms, and breasts
Were bare and brown ; the head was crowned with hair
As with the symbol of a mighty realm ;
All else was hidden in a yellow robe :
There sate she, doing nothing with her hands,
But quiet as Demeter in her cave ;
I moved me round till I could watch her eyes,
And then I felt my strength was like a dream,
And as a vision foreign seemed my shape,
And all that I have done like misty tales ;
Silence fell round me such as made the noon
As proper for the advent of a god
As midnight is for sudden Artemis ;
Then were thy words found voiceless, as when trees
On a still night seem hardly to be there :
Hast thought on sleep at all ?
On dreamless slumber pondered ever ?
What are we when we do not know ourselves ?
Where are we ? Is
The world about us still ?
We count it certain that the world is there ;
For we see others sleep,
And wake in the same place ;
But, oh ! how heavy on the mind it lies,
The thought of dreamless sleep !
If we will think of it
We find no help at all ,
Nor can we say one word ;
All of me slept except what gazed on her
And even so she was not like a dream.

PHOLUS

Ah, Medon ! Medon, how didst thou escape ?
For every woman is a thing of pity
That teaches love of weakness to the strong ;

They dream of pity when their hands do naught,
And, if they smile, have thought on tenderness.

MEDON

Nay, not this woman : hers were dreamless eyes.

PHOLUS

Fool, Medon, she will lure thee back to her,
For 'tis the nursing of a tender dream
That gives such power to a woman's glance,
Troubling so the hearts of centaurs even ;
Those girls that had this novelty of gaze,
They spread this madness through the race of men ;
For men were once as centaurs, proud of strength,
And scorned to win by numbers .. men were once
Our equals and their wives wholesome as ours,
Obedient to the male and calm with health !

MEDON This woman was as calm sea is, and hale...

PHOLUS

Ah ! Medon, strong men lied first to defend
Base weakness ; yea, for women's sake they lied ;
Their words were as our own when I was young.

MEDON I speak as centaurs speak and not as men.

PHOLUS

Fondly thou spak'st ; thus men have come to speak :
Yet always had man half a mind to this ;
Loving beyond the circle of his peers,
And pleased to talk,
Nay, happy even to laugh
With weaklings and with slaves ;
Prizing his woman not for wholesome soundness
And power to bear him sturdy little ones,
But for a sickly grace, a languid air,
And instant exhibition of vile fear ;
Because she hath the coward's knees at once,
When even a stoat bolts in and out the hedge.

MEDON

Nay, hear me speak, good Pholus, and believe

You are too quick to find me like a man;
I have not brought the woman back with me,
Yet, had I wished to bring her, she were here.

PHOLUS Speak, Medon: thou wast ever amorous,
And wentest forth to rape a woman hither;
Therefore forgive my no way groundless doubt.

MEDON

There sat the woman by her husband's door,
And I was in an orchard screened by trees.
Within the house there came a sudden cry;
This child had hurt himself and forth he came,
The little storm, weeping and howling too,
And flung his naked body 'gainst the knees,
Ruddy and brown, against the yellow skirt
Of his calm mother who looked down on him;
He stopped his howling, held pinched fingers up;
She took and kissed them, spoke low words to him,
And soon he smiled, stood up and rubbed his eyes,
Then gazed all round. His black and curly head,
The steadiness he had upon his legs,
His pouts that came to nothing in a smile,
And every part of him already male,
Forceful and eager, filled my mind with ease.

The centaur colt is beautiful and strange
Beside its mother, gazing from a cave;
Wondering that earth so fair is;
Asking the name of trees,
Of sun and moon and hill;
Hearing to-day, as for the first time still,
The answer that she made him yesterday:
To see him stand admiring width of space
And its soft-filling bath of light and air,
Smiling at evening's silence or the noon's,
Then, thinking that he hears a distant bird,
Half reeling with delight,

Impassioned for that voice of simple joy
Whose easy triumph over sweetest words
Makes him afraid his mother hears it not,
(Although he sees she hears)
Because she is less shaken than himself,
Less new to pleasure,
Less ignorant of pain;
To see him fills pubescent youth with glee
Almost as uncontainable as his,
Almost as novel, as ignorant almost,
Which makes him seek the youthful virgin out;
Which, when he finds her, makes her meek to him,
Not as before, suspicious and aloof.

O Pholus, thus I found Hippoноë;
Yet every promise that had filled my mind
Was butchered when she met her cruel death.

PHOLUS If weakness always had
The promise of a colt,
Then, then, indeed,
Man's worship of it were not quite insane.
But this, oh, this! is truth,
That nowhere else it seems to promise even,
And only seems in youth;
The promise of a colt lies in his strength,
So of a virgin in her strength it lies,
Though both indeed are weak.
Yea, man's thought is confused,
And not our thought, who see
Thus much alone of good;
Betwixt a vile beginning and vile end,
Welcome to contemplation of the mind,
We, centaurs, clearly see a few years' span
Wherein thought may be pleased,
Purpose effective more or less,
Our bodies strong, our enemies afraid..
A few years thus we see, but even they

Do dodge calamities and end
In loss of strength ; and worse,
More bitter yet than loss of strength, in loss
Of all significance.
It is not good that, though the earth be fair,
Our strength is so entangled and hemmed in ;
Gratitude is not due
For gifts so given that they mock themselves :
Wisely we judge of gods,
Wisely we judge of fate,
Who look for nothing that we cannot take,
Expecting loss of all we cannot keep,
And know our strength will often not suffice,
And know that we shall end in wretchedness ;
Yet, while strength lasts, on what it may acquire
Expend it, and rejoice that so much is
As we would have it be.

MEDON How this child sleeps !
In silence like the future's where our dreams
Wander and yet find naught but what they bring !
The room of all expectancy is here !
Thus spread the landscape in the happy eyes
Of loved Hipponoë !

Ah ! here,
As in an eagle's egg
Enjoyment of the empire of the air,
Is lodged a prophecy, a thing to be :
Behold, the moon doth rise ;
Her light, see, steals
Across the lichenèd surface of this slab ;
It reaches now his little foot, behold !
What roads, what sea-shores, and what craggy heights
Softly and firmly planted, shall this tread
And carry with it all our will's success ;—
Or else, the mere frustration of our love
It shall proceed with over marble floors,

Or where those women with the crafty eyes,
Pacing soft carpets in their curtained bowers,
Bewitch the strength that might have made a man
The centaur's brother.

PHOLUS O Medon, what is in this child that you
Without replying to my words of weight,
Dote so upon its feebleness?

We cannot rear it,
There is no hope we could;
Any of all the puking evils that beset
A weanling must suffice
To quite frustrate our best of care.

MEDON

Ah! Pholus, thou art old and slow to hope;
Yet hope, while we have strength for it, is good.
What though the day draw near
When I shall be as tardy as thyself
To please my mind with happiness not felt,
But fancied on the wing and longed for, longed for!
This night is now all lovely with the moon,
And, must to-morrow night be drenched in rain,
Yet we indulge our eyes with this delight
And so far banish every thought of storm
That tempest seems a thing impossible,
And even the clouds which erewhile clad the earth
Are hard to think of; hard to think of, Pholus,
While moonlight softens all the stars
And drapes the innocent and delicate charm
Of sleeping infancy o'er rough stern hills
And lights the salt sea up with such a smile
As comes upon the features of a child
When in his dreams he sees a butterfly
Float gorgeous down and nearly within reach.

PHOLUS Ah! yes;
The bitterest thought that we are doomed to think
Is that our joys were always groundless, always!—

And more of wisdom, more of knowledge, more
Of self-control, of power would have turned
Those hours, the only sweet ones we have known,
To indignation or perhaps despair.

MEDON Oh! then I thank my weakness; even I
Find weakness helpful as a woman does:
Yet think that I am stronger than thyself.

PHOLUS

Ah! for the moment stronger; but such strength
Carries within it such a grief as mine,
And thou dost know it surely even as I.

MEDON

Hug wisdom then, but hark: the child is here
And I who love him stronger am than thou:
Proud of the hope that's mine, I say, do this,
Help me rear up the child... and oh! assume,
Even if thou canst not feel, some cheerfulness,
Or I will leave thee and, with the babe alone,
Live out my active term how brief soe'er.

PHOLUS

Yea, be a fool while thou hast strength for folly
And force my wisdom serve thy wantonness!
Thou wilt but prove my bitterest thought most true.

MEDON

Enough, old grumbler; ha! thou mak'st me feel
Almost as I felt towards this youngster's dam,
When he did clamber on her knee and tried
To seize her breast with hungry eagerness:
She pushed him so that he slipped from her lap
And, when he climbed again, she pushed again;
At first, he only laughed at each rebuff,
But soon vexation changed the note of it;
Ere long like crested wave he raged and mounted;
She, with provoking strength, lazy contempt,
Baffled his wrath as easily as when
His first assaults had been half sapped by laughing.

It was her will to wean him, doubtless ; yea,
As it is thine to minish now my joy,
Because it doth surpass the bounds prescribed
To thine old age. Her breast was rich enough ;
And thou hast strength sufficient for much joy,
Though not such great joys as are mine, may be.
Why did she envy him the milk he craved ?
She knew no more than all thy wisdom knows
Why thou dost strive to check and thwart my hopes
Since thou admitt'st them necessary ? ha !
Nay, she had more of reason, since, ere long
She would have had, or may be had, another
Whose need of milk was greater than his was :
Though for her sleek contempt of his fine rage
There can be no excuse. He left her there,
As I will leave thee if thou so persist,
And with his little arms before his eyes,
And shaken with the fury he was in,
Staggered towards the orchard and towards me
Who guessed her will, as cold to my desire
As unto his ; content too ripe in her
To let her feel for those the edge of nature
Makes wild with hunger, angry with desire.
I seized the child ; perchance
She fathoms want by now ;
By now she paces bleak desire's den.
The music of her first alarum shrieks
Inspirited my career ;
It made me blind ; I took the wrong highway ;
And well-nigh was I in the town before
I knew the road mistaken, nor could re-find,
But made bad worse ; for soon the hunt was up ;
Thou sawest their torches as the evening fell ;
I think thou must have seen them even from here.

PHOLUS

I did, and will be pleasant to thee, Medon,

And nurse thy joys ; for thou didst very well :
That women should be proud, who reign by pity,
To the sole beings they have the power to scorn ..
Their children and their lovers, that they should
Makes all my blood boil in me ; let them learn
To acquiesce in all things to the male.

MEDON

Ha, ha ! the centaur glee shall rouse the hills
And turn their echoes giddy yet awhile,
Since Pholus joins with me and shares my joy
And is a centaur still, despite old age !
Come, revel in thy strength ; adore that fleetness,
Made musical with hooves, that leaves the man ..
Even the man on horseback, as a wave
Is left all angry, toiling after blasts
That sweep the ocean with tremendous glee !

PHOLUS I will ; I will ! my youth resurges now,
And shall employ unto the latest pulse
Life as the centaurs have determined wise ;
Not in a vain regret that things are ill,
But exultation that good strength is mine.

MEDON

The nights are short, and, hard upon the moon,
The sun will rise ; yea, half the light in heaven
Is his already.

Ha ! the youngster wakes !

—Ho, you rogue, my booty !

Laugh, little giant !

Shake thou thy stout limbs

Like a god's baby ;

Be careless and laugh !

[The CHILD, whom he has tickled, crows.]

MEDON Ha, ha !

Crow thou thy heartful !

Catch him, old Pholus.

Safe as a bird has he flown to thine arms.

PHOLUS Ho! he's so warm and so soft;
He clings to my beard like an ant;
His eyes are like birds
Quick peeping betwixt the tall stalks of the corn;
He shakes with delight;
He loves me already.—

Come, call me grand-daddy, come call me grand-dad.

CHILD Grand-daddy and dad.

MEDON He has called me his dad;
Toss him back to these arms.

Like a bird through the air, he is caught!

Oh! he shall run naked
Till hairs on him grow,
And he shall climb mountains
And trample their snow
Till hooves on him grow!
Till hooves on him grow!

PHOLUS Back with him! back to the arms
Of grand-daddy! the rogue,
He has come; has he come to his nest?
He shall feed on the best;
Here are berries, blue berries as soft
As the nipple that nourished him erst.
I squeeze the soft pulp through his lips.
He has eaten from my hand the first,
And therefore I hold him aloft;
Both my hands make a chair for his hips;
Such a chair, in the prow of men's ships,
Carries rovers above the loud billows;
So, through this copse of stunt willows,
My furrow I cleave with my lord.

MEDON Nay, Pholus, to me give him now;
For I can go faster than thou;
And he should be borne in the van;
Make a throne for his hips with my one hand I can!
See, now, he sits on the palm and the while

My fingers support him behind, and my thumb
He grasps with his left hand.—Yea, smile;
For the sun, from his bed that doth come,
Makes thee golden of all things the first.
Above the hill's top I lift thee so high
That I make thee the one golden cloud in the sky!
PHOLUS Shake thou thy little right fist at Apollo,
The God that is proud to be flattered by man;
For thou art the first that shall say:
“Though thou give me the day
Not to thee will I bow, no, nor can
Thine anger turn fate from the path she doth follow;
’Tis thy function to shine,
’Tis thy life, as to revel is mine!”
MEDON Yea, he shall have sons
And make much of his life;
The hills shall be his.
PHOLUS Down like a torrent he runs
And bears off a wife;
His hands shall she kiss
And be humble to him
And humour his whim;
She shall grow healthy and strong,
And her hair shall be long;
He shall strip from her all other dress,
Then the ease of her nakedness
She shall learn from her lord:
And her daughters, no more than wild mares,
Dream their beauty a thing they may hoard,
Nor consider their bodies as snares,
Engines baited with shame and with pleasure
In equal measure.
MEDON No, no, for they shall be glad
With simplicity clad,
Not conceiving that woven a cloth is
More fine or more soft than their skin!

Or that tint on the pinion of moth is
Which they could look lovelier in
Than the brown and the flush of their health!
Or that any other wealth
Could honour them more than children glowing,
The red delight within them flowing!

PHOLUS [holding up the child towards the sun]
See, see, thou king of the year!

Look! what a father is here
For the years to come!

This child is a male, dost thou see?

MEDON Apollo, hast thou no fear

That thine oracle might be dumb

For all the use it will be,

When a race from this child sprung,

Has conquered and cleansed all lands,

So that nowhere a temple stands

And to pray there is no skilled tongue?

PHOLUS Give, give him to me once more;

For here I have found a comb,

Its juice has so sweetened my thumb

That naught he has sucked at before

Was ever so much to his mind,

Nor any one else so kind

As Pholus, his gnarled grandsire.

MEDON Come, climb with him higher and higher!

PHOLUS

I will wrap the whole comb in green leaves;

For I have nursed children before

And remember how hungry they were.

Ah! my heart is still angry and grieves

For the colts that Bremoosa bore,

That were slain while they clung to her.

MEDON He shall avenge them, and thee

That wouldst not have been barren to me

My espoused, my Hippoноë.

PHOLUS Yea, he shall avenge all our race;
The grandchildren of those who slew them
His children shall slay;
Though for pity they seek in his face,
His arrows shall drive right through them
And he not know why they pray.

MEDON

He shall milk the wild goats on the mountains;
His feet shall grow sure as their feet;
He shall bathe in the clear rock fountains,
Till so clear is his mind and so deep;
And his joy shall be high as the snow-line
And embrace a vast plain with delight;
His laugh shall twang true as a bow-line,
Like arrows his songs take their flight.

PHOLUS And none who were pupils of Chiron
Were ever so strong or so wise,
Nor ever their eyes glowed with fire on
Battle's eve as our rage in his eyes
Shall glow without hindrance of pity,
Shall burn without let from remorse,
As havoc from city to city
He hounds on his destinied course.

MEDON But first, in high valleys,
When June is in blow,
He shall sleep and run naked
Till hairs on him grow!
Or in the hale winter
Shall powder their snow
Till hooves on him grow!
Till hooves on him grow!
[Winding up the valleys and across the ridges, ever
deeper & higher they travel into the heart of the range,
by turns carrying the child and arousing the echoes.]



ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE
TO CAROLINE

CHARACTERS
AIDONEUS GOD OF THE UNDERWORLD
PERSEPHONE HIS GODDESS
HERMES
ORPHEUS A THESSALIAN POET
EURYDICE HIS WIFE
MALE, FEMALE, OLD & YOUNG SHADES
OFFICERS OF THE COURT
SCENE
THE PALACE IN HADES

ACT I

The porch of Aïdoneus' Palace. At the back of the stage a wall of white stone, in its centre a square niche large enough to contain a score or more of rock crystal cups; above is carved

ΛΗΘΗΣ Ο ΒΑΨΑΣ ΕΝ ΡΟΑΙΣ ΠΟΤΗΡΙΟΝ
ΠΙΩΝ ΤΑ ΛΟΙΠ' ΑΝ ΟΥΚΕΤ' ΑΛΓΟΙΗ ΚΕΑΡ¹

Closing either side a row of Doric columns; between those on the left, three steps are seen to lead on to a lawn of asphodel²; behind those on the right, heavy curtains of cobweb-grey are drawn. EURYDICE in a gown of the same grey as the curtains is discovered leaning against a column on the left, and with anguished, pining mien gazes out over the Elysian fields. A FEMALE SHADE in similar dress, but wearing an asphodel in her neatly-braided hair, enters through the heavy curtains, approaches EURYDICE from behind, and addresses her with a soothing caress:

Be wise, be healed, come cross this fragrant lawn,
Kneel down on Lethe's bank ... see, here are cups;
Dip one, drink, be thy beauty's self .. believe me,
No longer need thy poor heart thus be wrung.

EURYDICE

My heart so bleeds, words cannot staunch the wound.

SHADE Be governed by thy beauty, not thy heart;
For beauty's rule is safe, and sound, and calm:
A tyrant of brief moods .. of indecision

¹ Whoever hath dipped a cup in the waters of Lethe and drunk thereof; his heart will ache no more.

² Here, of course, an ideal plant peculiar to the underworld and not to be associated with that which tourists identify in Sicily or Greece. It may, in this case, be visualised as a more freely flowering shamrock with white petals and grey-green leaves.

Strained and prolonged and fraught with fear, thy heart is.

EURYDICE Orpheus, ah me!

SHADE Poor sufferer, forth and drink,
And no man's name shall rowel thus thy flank...
Cups wait in this recess for all to take,
Cut from rock-crystal, rinsed, inviting use.

EURYDICE

Ah! to forget for me were worse than death.

[HERMES passes across from right to left carrying a CHILD SHADE, then a MALE SHADE enters through the curtains.]

WOMAN SHADE

O brother, take a cup and fetch a draught.

[Exit MALE SHADE over the mead.]

EURYDICE A second death and a worse pang
Must be mine ere his name shall leave me cold.

WOMAN SHADE

Thou dost prolong the bitter pang of death:
Once it was mine and I too clung to it,
But now a heart at peace orders my thought.

EURYDICE

Such order doth belie all living troth.

WOMAN SHADE

The truth of love is beauty, and a lie
The doting heart's insistence, for the kiss
And arms' embrace are images alone,
Mere outward symbols of an inward worth.

EURYDICE

Why dost thou prate here with thy clever tongue?
Flee from disorder, take thy solemn walks,
And leave Eurydice, unhappiest wife,
To her dishevelled hair and bursts of weeping.

WOMAN SHADE [to the MALE SHADE, who returns with the draught.]

I cannot change her, she is wild with grief.

MALE SHADE [to EURYDICE]

Drink, O fair sister, drink, and end thy fret.

WOMAN SHADE

Quaff, quaff the soft kind Lethe, be at peace.

EURYDICE [thrusting back the cup so that the contents are spilled]

I hate your soothing water; Orpheus weeps,
Salt tears run on his lips which smart and throb.

MALE SHADE [to the WOMAN SHADE]

O sister, those whose beauty is so great

One can but think it might have weaned them even

While they were living in the draughty world..

Those ever are the hardest to be weaned

From sucking at their drained and bitter hearts:

The perfect law of beauty seems to them

Less nourishing than ice...

WOMAN SHADE Hush, who comes here?

A WHITE-BEARDED SHADE [entering through the curtains]

Why has she not yet kneel'd on Lethe's brink?

THE OTHERS

She heeds us not, and still hugs misery.

[**THE THIRD SHADE** shrugs his shoulders and passes out on the left.]

MALE SHADE

Follow we wisdom, sister; rapt in thought,
Our former pangs can teach the musing mind
All that they failed to teach when the hot blood
Forced us to crave for things beyond ourselves.

WOMAN SHADE

Yet, oh! the pity that she should thus pine
In lieu of joining us upon these meadows
Of rarer scent than clover field in June!

MALE SHADE

Come, sister, come! she still doth learn of time,
And cannot mark immortal beauty yet.

[They go out over the meads.]

EURYDICE [after some moments turns and begins passionately]

Though I love Thessaly where Orpheus dwells,
And will love, and refuse Oblivion's cup,
(Zeus, hear and pity me, if thou art just!)
Than Lethe worse, worse than the dread heart-cramp
That overtakes these musing ghosts, I curse
Two things in Thessaly where Orpheus dwells;
One Aristaeus is, our herdsman king,
Whose hot blood and presumptuous handsomeness
Conceived he might seduce e'en Orpheus' wife,
Track her and capture in those happy glades
Where she went gathering simples. While from him
I fled through the tall grass, (Zeus, hear and pity!)
A second evil my foot glanced on, ah!...
Why, in a land so large and lovable,
Was such a small thing bad, the black forked tongue
Of a deaf adder? and among young men
Handsome and courteous and inclined to good,
The size of a man's heart or a man's brain,
Was so much hidden, all else fair, where evil
Lurked and had fostered her transforming power?
Here yet the wound is on my heel, the blood
Still moist and almost warm; I must return
And pray to sad Persephone once more,
And clamour at Aïdoneus' feet for leave
To be alive again there in those woods:
—Then Zeus, proud father of the happy gods,
Bid thou the snake bite Aristaeus' heel!
Whose vile intent deserved no less ill luck,
And guiltless I will grace his funeral.

[She hastens in through the curtains. The stage remains empty, then, in a rich copper-coloured cloak, with winged sandals, petasos, and caduceus, HERMES, leading a shade, enters from the meads and passes across; again the stage is left empty, then OR-

PHEUS enters as though doubtful of his way. He is dressed in a primrose-yellow tunic, with a cloak of russet-green, and sandal straps of the same, a chaplet of brown oak leaves on his head. He carries his lyre as though he had been recently playing on it, and cries]

Is this the portal of thy palace dread,
Aīdoneus, Polydegmon, Lord of Gloom?

Be thou propitious to adventurous love!

Guard thou, courageous heart, fidelity
Forgetful of its own defence, where thou
All unappalled by horror bearest rule!

HERMES [returning through the curtains, alone]

A man? and young? alive and beautiful?

—Whence comest thou so bold among the dead?

ORPHEUS I am a singer and from Thessaly.

[Aside with a sigh]

Whither will we not venture, O my heart?

HERMES

How comest thou without my conduct hither?

ORPHEUS

Love leads me; lo! I seek my dead bride here.

[Aside] Dainty, exclusive vision, thou art present...

Not as a dream were seen, nor as the world..

A dearer way view I Eurydice.

HERMES

Thou dost not ask me who I am; I only
Put question, am in wonder, take delight
(Being the sole life-lover who frequents
This kingdom of the dead) to meet with one
A comrade by his beauty and his age;
And by the power to walk where men may not
Proving, as it would seem, his brotherhood
With those ambrosia nourishes in halls
Of lasting pleasure on Olympus' hill.
Dost thou not care to ask me who I am?

ORPHEUS I have one only care, one only hope

To find my dear love, lost Eurydice.

HERMES

My name is Hermes ; though thou ask it not
I tell thee, and demand as a return
To know by what strange power thou walkest here
So self-absorbed in thine important woe?

ORPHEUS

Tuned by these golden strings I sang her name.

HERMES

Well, having loved myself I will not mock thee :
How didst thou win past dangers ; and how find
The right path mid so many void of light?

ORPHEUS [lifting his lyre]

Apollo's gift has soothed each monster's heart
And won me leave to pass from lair to lair !

HERMES

Has the three-headed dog an ear for music ?

ORPHEUS

I thank and kiss these modulated strings
Whose tones procured favour from Cerberus :
His eyes devoured in advance my flesh,
His lap-ears yielded to their lovely spell,
So he was laid to sleep.

HERMES

Thine eloquence and passion win my love ;
Yet surely Charon did not prize them much ?

ORPHEUS

Yea, the gruff Charon punted his huge barge
Athwart black eddies at the dismal ferry
Obedient to this music ; in their realm
The sorrow, the dire pain, the aged distress
Stood still, as one long absent coming home
Stands mute and drinks in all he sees and hears,
So they ; then sighed and pointed out my road.
By stepping stones the second river Lethe
Was safely crossed and then the happy shades,

Who, favoured, tread wide meads and sometimes sing,
Not asking for my music, let me pass;
For with ear leant to silence they seemed pleased
By solemn strains my sense could not detect.

HERMES

Yea, they are happy, for their hearts forget.

ORPHEUS

Should mine forget it were poor happiness!
Why linger I like one who doth forget?
Am I not he who loves Eurydice?

HERMES

'Tis written here, who dips one of these cups
In Lethe's flood and drinks, his heart shall ache
Never again: this the dead read; now say,
Have words more winning promise ere held out?

ORPHEUS

To most who die these words would seem divine;
Yet not for those who still love, still are young.

HERMES

Nay, death can teach the fondest, youngest, this;
Since, though their hearts forget, their minds grow clear,
They still can muse upon all bygone joys:
A fond vain quest is thine.

There, take my hand, let us wend back together;
Think thou of girls who in the vineyards sing
While the sun sets on calm late autumn eves;
There are so many that no one were missed
More than a single star that leaves the sky:
A fisher lad (who thought he marked the spot
Where star had dropped and thither toiled with oars
To dive and find he knew not what.. a lamp
To cheer his wattled hut, since they in heaven
Heed not their loss) would not more lose his pains,
Than thou must lose thy labour coming here.

ORPHEUS

Their minds, thou sayest, never do forget;

Then she will know me, she will welcome me?

HERMES Alack!

Suppose thyself, dear youth, suppose thyself
Sitting beside a fair shade, whose numbed heart
No present pleasure and no threatened pain
Could quicken; who, with absent-minded lips,
Should dreamily return thy rapturous kiss
And, if she spoke, speak only of the past,
And, quite un-eager, slightly scan the present:
Yet such behaviour Lethe-sippers have.

Once let them touch that fascinating draught,
And all are thankful that their hearts are dead.

ORPHEUS I have no ready credit for thy tale;
That smile is arch with malice: let the power
Of these strings first assail Aïdoneus' ear
And woo him to set free Eurydice.

Oblivious dalliance with girls whose eyes
Must teach by failing how her gaze could drench
My heart with peace, were no temptation to
Forget whose kiss still added a new joy
To rival which all past ones always failed
And even music threw her best away!

HERMES Thy music is full like to waste her best;
Eurydice with me hath passed this porch,
She pleads within, Aïdoneus sees her, hears her
Whose charm thou ratest far above thy lyre's.
What canst thou hope if she hath pled in vain?

ORPHEUS

Sweetheart! Eurydice!—Oh, let me pass!

HERMES Nay, listen; for I give thee good advice.

ORPHEUS Not I; Eurydice is now within ...

HERMES Blind lover, only where life is, is love:
And that is with the blithe Thessalian girls.

ORPHEUS [slipping the strap of his lyre over shoulder and head to have it hang at his back]

Why wilt thou get before me? have a care!

HERMES

Tut, tut! this wand can force thee stand and wait.

ORPHEUS

What thy words mean the wind best knows; give way!

HERMES [dropping his caduceus in order to seize
ORPHEUS by the wrists]

Wilt listen for thy profit or, unwarned,
Ignorant, blunder on calamity?

ORPHEUS

Eros, lend me thy power, thou too art god;

Drive fire through my arms to scorch his hands!

[He makes a great effort, wrenches free and rushes
past the curtains.]

HERMES [allowing his escape]

Then go! Alas, such is the human heart;
Who would not rid himself of such a master?

[retrieving his caduceus]

We gods control our hearts, command their service;

So we may woo a goddess, nymph, or woman

And then pass on to woman, goddess, nymph;

Compare her love with hers, nice beauties weigh ...

But, lo! I waste an amorous noon-tide hour.

In search of love, swiftly from hence I run

To islet bays where sea-nymphs take the sun.

[He trips out between the pillars on to the meads.]

CURTAIN

ACT II

A sudden thud, caused by the fall of a heavy weight; then the curtain rising discovers the Hall of AIDONEUS. He is standing, and has just hurled his sceptre before the feet of ORPHEUS, who, having entered from the left like one arrested in full race, appears as petrified near the centre of the stage, while EURYDICE, from the right, yearns across the arms of two OFFICERS, who prevent her rushing to embrace her husband. The thrones of AIDONEUS and PERSEPHONE are on a raised platform in the centre at the back. He is dressed in a long cloth of gold simar; an ample deep brown cloak is brooched about his shoulders, on which abundant black locks fall from under a simple hoop of gold. She wears a full gown of limpid water-green, sown with silver patines, and her beautifully braided brown hair is surmounted by a tiara of emeralds. The OFFICERS carry long wands of white wood; and are each cloaked in a huge black burnous, over which a hoop of steel presses down close above the brows, where it opens to be brooched again on the breast, falling in heavy volumes to their feet, and behind trailing on the floor. The architecture is everywhere lost in black velvet gloom. The SHADES, of whom at first there are many and afterwards a crowd are dressed, as before, in cobweb grey.

AIDONEUS [commencing as soon as the curtain is fully up]

Thou breathing man, who let thee pass our gates?
Thy flesh in many perils should have failed,
Tortured, and tested, and re-vomited
From our close kingdom where no life that wastes..
That ails and wastes, and eats, and breathes, and sleeps..
Dares cast a solid shadow or exhale
Heavy contamination on this air.

ORPHEUS

Thou scorn'st my flesh and breath and hat'st intrusion.
Since this fine calm and dignity are thine,
Thou lov'st them and to praise them pleases thee.
Think, then, how dear to me that presence was
Which made my life a deep dream-hallowed calm;
If beauty grows here and here gives delight,
Behold her who is staved back by the arms
Of thy black heart-bereavèd officers.
Look well upon her, for her colour's gone,
The freshness of her bloom is shaken off
As dew from flowers, shaken off by death;
Therefore add to her what the woods would add
Whose pleasant breezes and sunshiny air
In half an hour would add more than thou canst:
Yet, O thou king of solemn shades, attempt it,
That thou may'st think how dear she was to me
And what a courage her loss blessed me with.

AIDONEUS [to OFFICERS, who advance]
Remove him.

ORPHEUS Hark, here is a lyre laid
Cerberus fast in sleep, caused Tantalus
Forget his thirst; the stone of Sisyphus
While he leant resting on it stood stock-still,
Ixion suddenly revolved no more;
Hark, hark, Aïdoneus! these three strings
Are twisted from Apollo's golden hair.

AIDONEUS [to the OFFICERS]

Our Queen loves music, we will hear him play.

[When the OFFICERS have made the SHADES stand back, EURYDICE sinks to the ground, and holding with either hand to the upright wands of those who guard her, gazes out between them at ORPHEUS who plays and sings]

Where the streams wander

And frail stemmed trees are graceful like grown girls,
Ye have deep baths beneath quite secret banks;
But where o'er gravel beds their water purls,
There, there ye squander
On heedless swallows, herons poor in thanks,
A knowledge of your beauties to make wise,
O Nymphs of Thessaly, all human eyes.

When we were tender
And had clear minds, our elders told us how
Ye were so chaste that we need never dream,
In shallow sunning or from laurel bough
Drooped tall and slender,
Pensively tranced above the gliding stream,
To spy one of your beauties; yet we knew
Our bathing and our cleanliness pleased you.

Be blessed then;
And Aphrodite, she who gave to men
Her son whose eyes discover and revere,
Shall blessed be:
My eyes he trained to watch Eurydice,
Who from the goddess learned to steer
Staidly, delightful, free
From every kind of blame:
For like a trim-sailed ship she came
Across reaped furrows o'er the plain,
Round the turning of a lane,
Or through her father's open door,
The same yet lovelier than before
Each day, till sitting up in bed,
On that day's eve when we were wed
I saw her 'mid the tapers shine
By love and beauty made divine;
Aidoneus, let my tongue bless one god more,
No nymph, not Aphrodite, not her son,
But thee! restore

Our happiness that had but just begun!

PERSEPHONE [starting up, deeply moved in the silence with which the chant ended]

I had a childhood in the light of Heaven

Where the wind blew...

Ah! I was young, of marriageable years,
When hither, hurried by my lord, I came.
O husband, look upon him kneeling there;
Thou hast not seen that wanness on a cheek
Since first thou kissed it on this cheek of mine;
For not the hueless substance of a shade
But life is thus affected by this air,
The life of hope and ignorance and health
That has not brooded, as we all brood here,
Upon the past: he is not dead but young!
Oh! had we had a son!

He might be thus, Apollo might have taught
Our son to make such music; O my lord!
When I return each spring-tide to my home
The first few moments come like this young man
And take my breath away and shake my voice;
I weep, my lord, then every year I weep.

[Resuming her seat she weeps into both her hands.]

AIDONEUS

Thou shalt be one of us; thou shalt know death,
Know early death that in its young perfume
Uproots the stem of life, transplanting grace
That has not overgrown,
Without one promise blasted,
Without one hope disproved,
To this our stable and protective clime.
Such deaths both for the memory left behind
And for advantage gained here are the best.
The most regretted there, most envied here;
Then stay with thine Eurydice, with us
To be our son: soothe thou a mother's heart;

Thy music has a kinship and surprise
That should be more familiar to our ears.

EURYDICE

Oh! no, consent not, though he speak to please;
It could not be the same thing, Orpheus, here.

AIDONEUS

She is not weaned yet: restively prefers
Accident and uncertainty, and hope
Which binds the race of men to drudge and toil
In harsh inclement climes, and dupes their will
To live near neighbours to dismay, and pine
At mercy of the forceful elements.

ORPHEUS

The poorest men that are in all the world
Dwell at Orchomenos where princely merchants
Have palaces with gardens walled about;
From huts of mud they on Copais' shore,
Seek livelihood in offal thrown from ships.
Bare, save some shreds of sail-cloth round his loins,
Such weather-beaten form that scarce seemed human
Saw I on marble step, stock-still, before
The portal of a palace peering in
Over dark carpeted floors and couches spread
Whence came a noise of bracelets, ankle-rings,
Or necklaces on which ear-pendants tapped,
With a faint smell of musk and sandal wood.
I smiled to see that ghoul arrested there,
And said, "Come in with me, no doors are barred
To-day, all homes give welcome unto all."
But he drew back, he winced, and fled from me.
Ah! King Aidoneus, what we know we love:
And, with the very strength that our love hath,
Quick fear repels us from the thing unknown;
So children fly from strangers to their mother;
The sea shore and his hut gave more of joy
To that poor man than he could find among

Sleek concubines, who might have spit on him,
Or mocked his nakedness or ta'en offence
At the strong odour of his filthy trade;
Their carpets, and their couches, and their smiles,
Spake less of ease and pleasure than bleak shores..
To him, could promise less than wind and rain.
Thus what I had, has been enough for me;
My only need was peace to prize it in...
I am not old; yet must be made anew
Ere I can think this palace and these meads
Rival the woods of Thessaly, or this
Pale shade, Eurydice in bloom and health.
Though time be all here holy as a feast-day,
Ne'er willingly relinquish I warm life,
Nor think these strings would then as well respond
To frail dead fingers of a listless shade.

EURYDICE

Thou speakest truth, O husband; I am dead,
And what a pain I suffer thou mayst judge,
Divided from thee both by these staff-bearers,
And for my form would like a cloud let pass
Thy solid cheated arms fain of embrace,
If thou wert fain to love me as I am.

AIDONEUS

Hold thy peace, woman! thou still refusest Lethe
That, quaffed, allays the fond, outrageous heart.

EURYDICE

O Orpheus, be not thou persuaded. Nay,
Wouldst thou forget?
Ah, if thou wouldst forget, then drink at once:
Yet if not, love...

AIDONEUS

But though the heart forget, the mind shall know;
Memory is the essence of a shade.
What is still fails to endure and suffers change;
Truth is the lasting shadow of what was;

Prejudice ever leaps before each act
And shaping lies to please the violent heart,
Warps and confounds life's texture till it fail.

EURYDICE [after a prolonged pause]

O Orpheus, why this silence? dost thou dream
That there are homes like ours upon these meads ...

ORPHEUS Eurydice, I'll touch my lyre again,
For that has power where all our words are vain.

In Thessaly the hills are high,
On their green brows are caverns seen,
And many a coppice near the sky
Waves boughs that fan that blue serene:
Yet lower down the great woods stand
Ranged round a sunny meadow land.

Apollo walks our mountains tops,
And in their caverns satyrs dwell:
Dryades hallow wood and copse,
They hearts of fox and badger quell:
While water nymphs on a clear night
Wander the meadows in delight.

In Thessaly our home was built:
The sun will parch its jessamine,
The honey from our hives be spilt
By satyrs, Dryades begin
To milk our bleating ewes at dawn,
While up the lane to pull our plums,
The youngest nymph by moonlight comes:
There stretched at full length on the lawn,
Under the heavy laden boughs,
She, while the dormice squeal and rail
Sigheth to think the vacant house
Of those who gave her tithe and chaunt

Must soon become the foxes' haunt,
And all those pious customs fail.

PERSEPHONE [after eyeing AIDONEUS expectantly for a little, starts up and addresses him.]

Thou art not moved!

To thee whom peace and knowledge satisfy
Hope seemeth wilful, childish : thou dost sit,
As, when I went a hunting in my teens
With Artemis whose nymphs outrun the stag,
I have seen wood-cutters squat round a fire,
Who watched the pale sheet of its torpid smoke
Drift in behind the trunks and stems of trees,
Of which now one with short and knotty boughs
Stands out in black ; then, with the wind the cloud
Lunging, becomes a ghost ; while five slight stems
Nearer to one side start out in relief.

So thou dost sit and watch occurrences
Like to such woodmen, neither loving more
This tree than that, but satisfied they change,
Waiting their transformations hour by hour.

Too long hast thou dwelt here, oh ! far too long !
But I have touch still with the world above ;
Hope yearly bears her blossom in my mind,
And their fond tears come over me as o'er
A quiet lake a sudden shower of rain,
When what was placid as a space of sky
Is dibbled into dints, confused with mist..
A surface mist of splashed rebounding points
Of rapid light...

Ah, in mine agitation I can urge
What I have never urged before to-day,
Thy debt to me, whose love refused me once
A boon I craved, which then from thee was forced
With legal rigour by my father Zeus ;
Yet thy love owed it as return for mine :

The strength of all thy suit was just one seed,
One seed of ripe pomegranate which I ate,
Such was the plea thy sullenness relied on
Who might have pled my love, my many kisses.
Have I not still returned to thee each year
Of mine own will? then grant me what I ask:
Let this fond child who hugs her pain and spurns
The proffered draught of Lethe, let her live
Instead of me, let her return to earth;
For my return was forced from thee who yet
Should have accorded it from a full heart
With joy; then gladly now grant thou my prayer
And prove thyself my husband, O my lord!

AIDONEUS

Strange are thy passionate words, Persephone,
Strange as that music which preceded them:
This day is not like others in my hall,
Almost as signal as hours I spent in pains
To soothe and woo thy frightened loveliness
What time I, not attending here, had rapt
Thee from the world of light and brought thee hither,
So signal almost is this hour now past!
I prize and gladly own thy faithfulness
And will e'en humour this wild whim of thine.

[To ORPHEUS]

Thou hast not played in vain, O harper youth;
My goddess thou hast touched, and thou hast lured
To throng from distant courts the inmates here:
I also hearkened to thy tune and words
As, when a child, I reasoned with the stars;
Whose loveliness implored me, so I deemed,
Not as Zeus and Poseidon to engage
In that blind turmoil fostered by the sun,
Who breeding winds and shadows, life and change,
Contrasts to their sweet constancy all else..
For everywhere the constant and sweet stars

Confront an anarchy of waste and change.
So when our well-contrived rebellion closed
The senile drag of Cronos' vast misrule,
When they both greedy grasped their thirds of realm,
I found content in what my brothers left,
And here ordained forgetfulness of woe,
Purgation from the mastery of greed,
And constancy and peace conformable
To that sweet empire of the unwearied stars.
Yet Love, a youthful goddess very still
(Though passionate yet stilled by thoughtful awe)
Prepared and caught my heart, triumphed and drove
Me through some wild rash doings, some mad days;
So that she sits here sweet and very quiet,
Who heard thee and demands for thee thy will...
Which before granting I declare will prove
Thine anguish and frustration and mere ruin.

ORPHEUS

Thou dread Foreknower how am I to speak
Who cannot even glance an hour ahead?

EURYDICE

But I foresee, O husband! being dead
I know what thou wilt look like, how behave...
The taste for Lethe water once acquired
We shall be less ourselves than are old folk
Who, stiff, yet bustle round and talk and laugh.

ORPHEUS

Thou dreadful Regent, what am I to urge?
Green leaves torn from the summer's crest are we
And blown in hither.. Look at us and say
How can we beg to wither, brown and mingle
Patient with mould?..

How can we cease to long to flourish yet
Among the tender plumage of a bough?...
If there is order here
Is there none under the blue sky? no beauty?

Though where clouds form and pass there be ill luck,
Had not fair fortune crowned our springtide loves?

AIDONEUS

Zeus has established order in his realm
Where love, that would be constant as the stars,
Is more at home, thou deemest, than with us.
We waive our knowledge; be convinced by time.
News runs that Dionysus rules in Thrace..
Well, let our youngest nephew deify
That restless craving for unreasoned change
By which things raw take precedence of seasoned
Till stable towers fall chaotically;
Heed not such signs; heed thou thyself, set forth!
Thy bride shall follow thee... Yet look not back
Until the heavens roof her, look not back,
Or thou shalt see her caught away to us,
And living never see her any more!

ORPHEUS [to the accompaniment of his lyre]

O god and king, I thank thee first
Whose voice is deep with power;
Yet thou, in fond suspense immersed,
Hast known that daybreak hour,
When bedded bridegroom with a moan
Dreams she has left him there alone.

[To PERSEPHONE]

I thank thee next, thou gentle queen,
More healing than the night
Of which thou knowest the spell and charm,
When, waking without fright,
In scented June the new-made bride
Knows her beloved lies at her side.

[He rises from kneeling, and goes forth on the left.]

AIDONEUS

Descend, O spouse, and kiss with thy kind lips
The wan mouth of his dead yet anguished bride.

PERSEPHONE [descending to EURYDICE]

Thou lovely child, that mindst me of my youth,
It is not wholly well thou hast thy will.

[She kisses her, and EURYDICE's dress becomes pure white.]

I know that when the fond breeze lifts her hair
And through the trees warm lace-work of the sun
Moves on her pensive form, a young girl's mind
Is won from thought, and either reveries
All blithe and happy rap her into bliss,
Or she starts up, or quickly falls to work
And sings and laughs and stirs and dances on
Till tired she must sleep the whole night through:
Yet not to exhaust her strength and so to wake
In early twilight, certain quiet days
A watchful soul may not unwisely choose:
The hours of dawn thereafter to employ
Because of their clean silence, as a time
Sacred to thought that sifts and sets aside
The pure increase from the dead draff of living,
And if there is no increase may repent
And bathe her earnestness in holy tears,
As here the clearer nature weighs and knows,
Or is by Lethe ridded of past blemish:
For Lethe's action is like that of tears,
Shed for faults self-discerned and self-reproved.

EURYDICE

O Lady, I will weep on summer dawns
For every fault their silence helps me feel.

PERSEPHONE

Thou shalt, but now shalt taste of this, my child,
Ambrosia; for so much as this gold box
Will hold I bring back every year from Heaven.
There, take a little; now make haste, quick, quick,
Trip after thy brave husband.—Lead her, some one.

EURYDICE O lady, goddess, mild Persephone,
My heart so thanks thee that I cannot speak,
Nor dare I to thy dread lord utter thanks.

[Curtseying, EURYDICE hastens out following an officer.]

PERSEPHONE [as she returns to her throne]
My lord, I fear her heart though sweet is light..
Her innocence needs quiet, not the world.

AIDONEUS [as his queen resumes her seat]
My spouse, thou hast thy will, then rest content.

CURTAIN

ACT III

The palace-porch the same as in the first Act. Through the curtains right come a group of silent shades, four, six, or eight, according to the size of the stage. They are met by a single shade arriving from the meads, on the left, with some slight precipitancy.

SINGLE SHADE

Yet more demands on pity! Hermes hither
Bears that Greek girl the Queen restored to life.

MALE SHADE

Could not ambrosia still her clamour longer?

WOMAN SHADE

What, hapless yet! with all she yearned for granted!
[HERMES enters left, bearing the shade of EURYDICE; he lays her down, centre front.]

SINGLE SHADE

Her eyes see nothing yet, or thing afar.

HERMES [waving them back]

Let her have room!

WOMAN SHADE How should she die again?

MALE SHADE

Did Charon's oar mow the thick-crowded wharf?

WOMAN SHADE

Or Cerberus club her down with heavy paw?

SINGLE SHADE

Could not his lyre charm such brutal strength?

HERMES

Her hopes' excess, or you will say remorse,

Mistaking sun thrown off a basalt wall,

For very azure, cried, "The sky! the sky!"

Convinced she stood beneath the open heaven,

All doubt forsook her fond avidity.

WOMAN SHADE And he looked round?

HERMES No, no!

MALE SHADE Then, how?

HERMES She fell and sobbed;

Too absolute joy unsinewed so her limbs,
That like despair it laughed up from a depth
Unsounded by past mothers of her breed,
“I never can again be what I was.”
“Hither!” he shouted from the open air,
“Wind and sun greet me here, reach not to thee!”
Yet she but groaned
“Our life out there was one long hideous hunger!”
“Whythus blasphemē?” with that he turned, “Art mad?
Art ill?” not courage his lips brought, but death.
[With a slight laugh of relief he skips out over the
meads.]

EURYDICE [slowly throwing off her swoon]
What have I done? what hast thou done? What, what,
My deep espousèd dear, can we have done?
WOMAN SHADE [kneeling beside her]
He is not here... Thou art once more a shade.
EURYDICE
The thought's so cruel that I dare not think it...
WOMAN SHADE Fetch her kind Lethe..
[MALE SHADE takes a cup and runs out over the
meads.]

WOMAN SHADE Thou shalt taste peace.
EURYDICE
My mind would still bar out what has crashed in...
WOMAN SHADE
Let Memory's gentle arms enfold all that...
EURYDICE [sitting bolt up]
Had I held warrant to put out the sun
And plunge young April's glory in dead night,
So abject was my mood, it had been done...
WOMAN SHADE Regret no longer...

EURYDICE
I slew our children though they were but hopes...
MALE SHADE [handing the cup to the WOMAN
SHADE] Hopes like frail flowers, are but born to die...

EURYDICE [continuing]

As who should not reck though a whole town burnt
So she might warm her hands...

[kneeling up and placing both arms on the WOMAN SHADE'S shoulders, so that she seems to endanger the cup she is holding]

Could I conceive that fatal mood? ... like babe
It, dead, freighted my womb as I had hoped
To feel live-ripeness ... [hiding her face in her hands with sudden horror] the bastard had,
When I beheld my writhing treason, features
As wicked as my husband's mien was good!...
Had I but guessed where evil lurked in ambush,
I had found some fierce means to heave it forth
Too soon for life!—Oh, no, no, no, my love,
It was not I that gave this madness birth!...

This is some hideous dream.—Now! who are ye?

MALE SHADE [retaking the cup and holding it to EURYDICE'S lips]

Behold the sovran philtre which stills pain ...

HERMES [re-enters bearing a CHILD SHADE in misery astream with tears]

First wet these lips. This bud fell from the stalk
Though but half-opened...

MALE SHADE [turns to him and holds the cup to the CHILD'S lips.]

CHILD SHADE [joyously as it slips down from HERMES' arms] Mother, mother ...

[as though following someone it runs in through the curtains.]

WOMAN SHADE

In memory she finds what most seemed lost.

MALE SHADE [to EURYDICE, offering her the cup] Drink and be eased.

EURYDICE Ah! I remember, once
Fury refused this draught, convinced that I

Was better, happier, yea, a thousand times
More to be envied than such shades as you...
But my mind brewed such icy poison..as..
Teaches me no more trust mad thought... Take thanks
Ye who t'wards my abjection tilt this chalice.
ORPHEUS [entering from the left with his lyre
slung at his back]
Put down that cup!...

EURYDICE The taste is on my tongue...
ORPHEUS Throw that down! follow me!
EURYDICE [rising to her feet very carefully to
prevent the cup from spilling]
The taste is new, is strange...
ORPHEUS [holding out his hand to take hers]
 Thy hand here! Hasten!
EURYDICE [raising the cup to her lips, once more]
But I forget the taste...
ORPHEUS [throwing himself towards her]
 Never again
Lip that death-venomed brim!
HERMES [preventing him] She is a shade,
Stand back; thine arms are flesh.
ORPHEUS She is not yet
Bride to unfruitful sighs, but wed to me!
EURYDICE [having sipped again]
This taste clarifies memory... Ah yes!...
[with a low laugh of surprise]
I thought myself a bliss that could but bless
The grass which my warm feet shall tread no more...
ORPHEUS
Nay, haste! these words blight opportunity!
EURYDICE [continuing as in reverie]
Bless those tall trees into whose branch-raised domes
I, standing by the bole, would oft look up
While green light filtered through the trembling leaves.

ORPHEUS Cease, cease to loiter with dead on-a-times!

EURYDICE [continuing as before]

Those streams where thou wouldest loiter all day long,

And leave thy lyre idle on thy lap

So bell-like chimed the revel of their ripples...

ORPHEUS [stamping with impotence]

Break free! break free!

One instant's faith bestows eternity!

EURYDICE [turning from him with a far-off gaze]

Yea, Thessaly, I dared believe I blessed

Thy nymphs, thy shepherds, and thy well-tilled fields..

My heart forgetteth naught it thought to bless

And thought to be blessed by, deluded; for

Hunger pined in me for none knew what peace...

My bliss hung like a landskip in a tear,

By globèd mirror surface there interned...

I, even in thine arms divine, was absent...

And bliss went like cold tremor through a stone

Thrilled by glad echo...

ORPHEUS Spit that poison out!

Some still is in thy mouth, not swallowed yet.

EURYDICE

E'en then my heart knew that it dreamed, deceived...

ORPHEUS I am no dream, no echo, no deceit!

EURYDICE

Though thou wert no deceit, thou wast deceived...

I counted thee mere booty, mine to flush

With wild intoxication that would be

More than itself and other than it seemed...

ORPHEUS Delirium! nay, I will not listen! cease!

[The CHILD SHADE tripping in from between
the curtains stops curious, and listens.]

EURYDICE

I cared not for thy music, only felt

That thou wast mine, mine, mine, all mine!

ORPHEUS

This is sheer madness, that filthy potion's work!

CHILD SHADE

Oh, no, it is a wonder, Sir, I drank

And saw my mother ... There! behold our home ...

[pointing back at the curtains]

See, it is bowery thick with honey-suckle...

The sun is hardly up, 'tis milking time;

My sheep bleat to be led to browse the lawns;

And bread to bake will mark this the best day

Of seven ... Hark! milk drums in mother's pail;

So I make haste to lead my sheep afield.

[She trips out onto the meads.]

EURYDICE

Weigh her words well, Orpheus, thou, that dreamt not

I rather had destroyed thee than have left

Thee rapt in music far away from me.

ORPHEUS O wretched cankered soul...

EURYDICE Yes, I was mad.

THE WHITE-HAIRED SHADE

Yea, peace is whole and seeks no complement;

Goodness must give itself and begs for naught:

But souls, that fragmentary ache imperfect,

Can only by mute worship be absorbed

Within that music that till then they jar.

To lose their own, not seize on other's soul,

Should be their effort's goal...

EURYDICE Ah, what was mine? .

ORPHEUS

A dissonance that struck full chord with mine.

EURYDICE

Nay, though we chimed, we lacked so much the more...

The tune which could absorb us hung o'erhead,

A muted throbbing round a god in pain.

ORPHEUS

Apollo, see my lyre! ... why mock me thus?..

O look! or rather look not!.. How forlorn!..
Two of thy hairs snapped when I flung away
Thy gift to succour her prostrate despair!

EURYDICE

Alas! its music was thy usher hither;
How hast thou here returned without its help?

ORPHEUS

I held it up and played the one string left
And expectation charmed ears that had yearned
To hear again what they had heard but once:
So I escaped before their eyes, half-closed,
Could open on deception and attend.

EURYDICE

How then wilt thou return? will that one string
Bid those forbidding rocks swing back like doors
Disclosing that steep road which ever narrows
To thwart all those who would return to earth,
But before us, Apollo-bidden, widened?

ORPHEUS

Reminding me of this thou mightst as well
Rub salt in a raw wound; my lyre is useless!

HERMES

I wait to guide thee back to life and love.

EURYDICE

Drink, darling, drink with me; let us share peace!
[She sips again, then hands ORPHEUS the cup which
he takes as though fascinated.]

WHITE-HAIRED SHADE

Yon garish life uncomprehended stumbles;
Here consciousness being whole, need not so halt..

ORPHEUS Yet never can be rapture.

EURYDICE

Art thou sure,

Rapture is not half terror lest bliss flag?

Panic intrudes not on these tranquil throngs.

ORPHEUS

Their calm is but the absence of desire.

EURYDICE

That life was mad with fear, this is secure.

WHITE-HAIRED SHADE

Nothing shows perfect till it no more is.

ORPHEUS

Memory mothers naught but ghost and shadow
To last no longer than time serves to fade in.

WHITE-HAIRED SHADE

Life breaks her bones, rends flesh and bleeds and suffers:

While anguish past can here appear divine.

HERMES [impatient to be going]

Love proffers warmth, that cup is cold with horror.

ORPHEUS [with a shudder emptying the crystal on the ground]

No notes prolong bliss in this numbing stillness.

HERMES

Well done! Life is the whole of good; set thought
On eyes that laugh beneath a wimple's shadow
Or watch white feet unsandalled tread cress leaves
Or a lax girdle slip upon firm hips;
Picture earth's lovely nooks where such forms haunt;
Follow me winged with youth, for I shall soon
Rustle across the tree-tops in my flight,
Then dip and with my shoulder furrow fields
Of golden wheat as swallows graze a lake
When they for glee skim close and dart along:
But first I lead thee forth from this grim gloom.

EURYDICE

Go, darling, go; the seemliness of others
May with false words enticingly be limned,
But in them that greed lurks as once in me
Could tear thee limb-meal... Ah! I now foresee
Remorse for peace, yearning for all left here,
Will make thee deaf to those who claim life from thee;

Then they like lynx and ounce shall round thee leap
In thwarted flames of fierce acquisitive rage.

HERMES

What! hast thou blenched? thus ever jealous wives
Would scare their husbands from the fresher lure.

ORPHEUS [taking HERMES' hand]

Farewell, discoloured and unpassioned shade,
Thou, ghostly travesty of dead truth, art merely
Hindrance to recollection of thy beauty,
Which life in others might better help me worship.

That drug has changed thee till thou no more art
Pined for as wind and sun are here yearned after.

EURYDICE [as HERMES, leading ORPHEUS,
steps on to the meads]

The cruel wind and sun are as I was,
Who here for love wait patient as the past.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

MOODS THAT PONDER

THE SERPENT

TO CHARLES RICKETTS, R.A.

HAIL Pytho! thou lithe length of gleaming plates,
War's choicely finished work and instrument,
Ingenious death's device! what groping hates
Hast thou taught to evolve their dull intent?

Men treasonous from thee learn subtle skill,
Thou vision! Beauteous devil of the grass,
Quick-sighted and close-thoughted, what a thrill
Through conscious souls thine undulations pass!

With nicety applying gliding bark
To rigid serpent forms of trunk or bough,
Thou climbest, and canst sling thy length or yark
Thy small malignant head, and in all how

Well demonstrate the precise use of power,
Yet long wilt thou in lassitude lie gloomed;
Though lightning-swift to strike, wilt lose an hour
Watching, more still than indolent queen, thy doomed.

Relentless tautening cable, thou canst mangle
Bull-bison, snap off those raised arms of trees
Where sloth bears hang, or from a tortuous tangle
Be self-resolved with smooth unfaltering ease.

Thou dancest.. art more fatal than our young
Women whose lascive limbs yet tyrannise..
Fascinatest with tiny flickering tongue,
And tigers quail before those beads, thine eyes.

Five hundred forms thou hast, five hundred lengths
Stretched from a span long to a fabled mile;
As many hues as diverse mails; and strengths
Of venom to match every depth of guile..

The innocent blindworm like love's deceit,
And then the snake, the adder, viper, asp,
Whose bites, like common injuries, defeat
Not leechcraft, or the hand's repentant clasp.

Cobras there are too, as their mortal foes
Are, from whom poison can be taken ; nay,
That can be charmed by the spell music throws ;
Their friendly service shall the vermin slay.

There is the boa-constrictor, that ne'er will
Untighten, but envelopes and consumes ;
And doubt absorbs with nightmare coils of ill
Hope and the room for heaven, while life fumes,

And sweet affections fret, and all looks drear
Till youth's fair morning seem a flux of dreams,
And time and space and power be symbolized clear
In age-long serpents black, with baneful gleams,

Wound like the orbits wherein planets move
Through spectral convolutions purposeless,
Devoid of joy, devoid of warmth, of love,
The vast digesters of man's vain distress.

Limbless and surging thine invasion sweeps
And loops itself the towering height of night ;
Or through the water-conduit flows ; or creeps
Like the round darkness of a pipe to light ;

Emerged, proceedeth through the city dead,
Contented. Jungle vines have curtained all
Those pillared halls, where Solitude is fed,
And Stillness mute and dreadful hears thee crawl.

Rank vegetation preys on fane and tomb,
Muffles the tower and revels on the roof,
One woven extravagance of gaudy bloom
That, caved in o'er some court, has strained its woof.

There-through the sun's ray probes at sultry noon,
Across mosaic feels with scorching stealth.
Thou waitest its caress, approaching boon,
The slow sole kiss that helps thee love thyself.

All other lives are banished : not a beast
Dares venture near the hall where thou dost lie ;
No ferret filches at thy gloomy feast,
Nor bird nor ape dare wake thee with a cry.

That kiss received which mindeth thee of hell,
That lonely gluttony and torpid trance,
That smouldering fury or alertness fell,
That grandeur when thou dost to kill advance..

In all thy moods, thou virulence, we share :
Our forefathers have borne thee on their shields,
Symbol of passions trusted to prepare
The delectable transport that all carnage yields.

Among our thoughts thou threadest well-worn ways ;
And, though the recognition of thee hurt,
Discreet, thou hast for thy redeeming grace
That charm efficiency must needs exert.

VALUE AND EXTENT

THE more they peer through lenses at the night,
The finer they split rays of stellar light,
The vaster their estimates
Of distances, of movements, and of weights!

The stupor of this unimagined size
Like a mole's eyelid palls the keenest eyes.
Yea, like unearthed moles,
We, by truth tortured, writhe outside those holes..

Dark homely galleries of confined thought,
Whose utmost reach must now be held as naught
Compared with that grand space
Which those unlike us may superbly grace.

Substance more subtle, forms of comelier growth,
Diviner minds, nothing but mental sloth
Prevents us thus to bid
Against the size revealed, with worth still hid.

No reason can be urged why all this room
Should hold no more life than, within a tomb,
The first small worm that stirs;
For all known life is less in the universe.

Undreamable communications, sun
To sun, may be the hourly routes they run,
Swifter even than light,
On business purer than a child's delight!

Not that I can, like scornful Plato, fear
Our fine things but poor copies of true worth;
Proportioned to this earth,
There thrill and shape small genuine glories here.

THE PANTHER

TO C.S.R.

CONSIDER now the panther: Such the beast
On which the naked feet of Circe rest..

Her footstool wherein anger is increased
For ever, yet for ever is suppressed.

Sleek, powerful, and treacherous, and cowed,
With amber eyes like tears that watch a lamp ..
A Queen's tears, thwarted by remembrance proud,
Clear cut as gold coins that her mint doth stamp.

How politic is grace in moods morose!
This smooth composure waits but our caress;
'Tis pride put on to beggar love; there glows
Knit with this strength some utter tenderness.

That blunt round paw, and padded glove-like palm!
How strange, if there, like dulled assassin steel,
Sheathed claws wait ready! Thus in forest calm
That cruel face the ferns' arched fronds conceal.

Then all is glowing, like deep-treasured glee:
E'en butterflies might settle on this coat;
The shy gazelles may snuff full gingerly..
Rich blossoms drown the odours they should note.

The holy baobab, with grey-blue stems
And aisled vistas solemn as a church,
Denies this presence, and this life condemns;
Its meek-eyed throngs would wrong it should they search.

A bound! a scamper! cry! the sob of death!
And these claws open up the heart that pang
Had filled to bursting with a last gasped breath;
Warm blood is lapped, and fleshed is every fang.

Hereto conspired the beauty of the place,
Whose whole consent seemed given to life's ease.
Thus, by a garden walk, some poppy's grace
Brings down a child sultana to her knees;

Whose tall indifference prompts her fond hand
To stoop its cup, where drowsy drops of dew
Roll and unite like quick-silver, or stand
In lustrous clots, then self-divide anew:

All, with a kiss, her human heart soon must
Attempt to possess; or quaff, with amorous sip,
Those wilful gems freighted with purple dust,
Where lurks a bee-sting venom'd for her lip;

For while large petals closed at shut of eve,
The bee ceased not to gorge, could not burst free,
Fumed through the night, and stingless took his leave.
Thus rage in this beast pent left perfidy.

But, lo! they yawn, those wide-hinged python jaws,
Unroof the rose-pink ivory-studded bed,
Where, like a languid flame, the lithe tongue draws
Its moist caress round gums and hollows red.

Dost, cloyed by rich meats spicy as the south,
Expose thy fevered palate to the cool,
Which, like snow melting in an emperor's mouth,
Helps make excess thy life's ironic rule?

Soft-coated, each curved ear seems some weird flower,
Whose gulf with silken lashes gleams replete;
Such yield to let the fond fly, feasting, lower,
But close and stiffen to forbid retreat.

Thus canst thou draw our thought, by subtler hints,
Still further down the vortex of thy spell;
Lace-winged on delicate feet it onward glints..
A trickling tear.. a soul hung over hell.

Those cushion brows, with sullen show of thought,
Deceive the eye; so emery, cloaked in state
Of some mock scarlet berry needle-wrought,
Maketh a young child marvel at its weight.

Can they be vacant? Can thy strong neck raise,
Without the aid of magic, thy full brain?
Of thee our child-thought in the mind delays,
Whence to dislodge it reason toils in vain.

The mystery of evil and its charm
Prevail, like beauty, radiant from thy form;
Thou art an enemy that can disarm
Man's arrogance, which like a swollen storm

Sweeps all creation with the tyrant force
Of his long hunger for congenial dreams;
Though he condemn thee, yet as in remorse
He thy soft pelt a couch for beauty deems ..

Spreadeth it for the bride his ecstasy
Crowns Rose of Sharon, Lily of the valleys..
Voweth it doth become her, likening thee,
Soul of the woods, to her, soul of his palace.

A SONG WITHOUT RHYMES

I MUST free my lips

I Kiss complete on kiss to number:

Pauses give that pulse to music

Death and silence lack.

Time has need of day

Night from bounteous night to sever:

Suns are flushed with anger setting;

Love is vexed at dawn.

We perforce must die

Ere Life re-achieve our marriage:

Needs must be that flowers wither

Or there were no spring.

A SPANISH PICTURE

THY life is over now, Don Juan;

Thy fingers are so shrunk

That all their rings from off their cold tips crowd,
Where limp thy hand hath sunk;

On a trestle-table laid, Don Juan,
A half-mask near thine ear,
A visor black in which void gape two gaps
Where-through thou oft didst leer.

Thou waitest for the priests, Don Juan,
To bear thee to thy grave;
Thou'rt theirs at length beyond all doubt, but, ha!
Hast now no soul to save.

Thou wast brought home last night, Don Juan,
Upon a stable door;
Beneath a young nun's casement, found dropped dead
Where thou hadst wooed of yore:

To pay their trouble then, Don Juan,
Those base grooms took thy sword;
A rapier to fetch gold, with shagreened sheath,
Wrought hand-grip, and silk cord;

Which, with thy fame enhanced, Don Juan,
Were worth hidalgo's rent;
Yet on which now, at most, some few moidore
May by some fop be spent.

Dull brown a cloak enwraps, Don Juan,
Both thy lean shanks, one arm,
That old bird-cage thy breast, where like magpie
Thy heart hopped on alarm.

Yet out beyond thy cloak, Don Juan,
Thrust prim white-stockin'g'd feet
(Silk-stockin'g'd feet that in quadrille pranced round)
Slippers high-heeled and neat;

Thy silver-buckled shoes, Don Juan,
No more shall tread a floor,
Beside their heels upon the board lies now
A half-peeled onion's core:

Munching, a crone that knew, Don Juan,
Thy best contrivèd plots,
Hobbles about the room, whose gaunt stone walls
Drear echo as she trots;

She makes her bundle up, Don Juan;
She'll not forget thy rings,
Thy buckles, nor silk stockings; nay, not she!
They'll go with her few things.

Those lids she hath pulled down, Don Juan,
That lowered ne'er for shame;
No spark from beauty more in thy brain-pan,
Shall make its tinder flame:

Thou hast enjoyed all that, Don Juan,
Which good resolves doth daunt,
Which hypocrites doth tempt to stake vile souls,
Which cowards crave and want;

Thou wast an envied man, Don Juan,
Long shalt be envied still;
Thou hadst thy beauty as the proud pard hath,
And instinct trained to skill.

THE YOUNG MAN'S FONDEST FOE

MOTHERSenslave their sons, from honour hide,
Pamp'ring the body while the spirit pines,
Are prompt if throat, deaf if soul have sighed.
From all that great is their blind fear confines.
Yet they spur worthless hopes on mean careers:
What gilds trash, saps resolve, like mother's tears?

How few have dared like Semele to pray
Their son might ford beyond them and grow strange?
Granting him to a grandeur that must slay
In him what sorted with their own life's range?
Can mortal fathers this? then how should these,
Who cowering won, prospect what the eagle sees?

Can lovers fond prefer for those unborn
Ideal parents? recapture hope set free
In passion's trance, through which unearthly scorn
Hounds all they erstwhile were, all they must be
When those swift hours have mewed their towering wings,
And feelings are again time-tethered things?

TRAGIC FATES

I. VIRGIN

Suggested by three designs by Alphonse Legros.

PREPARED by gentle living, Gifted Body,

Arrived still young at apex of thy grace,
No virile form thy master.. might a god be,
For more of worship could the heart find place?

What lover could complete thee? Holiest passion
With ardour humbled, stricken dumb must gaze
At forms divine already and whose fashion
At most awaits an ambience of praise.

Could children carry forward such a treasure?
Through all vicissitudes of gradual growth
Are they not dwarfed by pride? seduced by pleasure?
And even the likeliest somewhat dulled by sloth?

Thou, perfect here and now why not hereafter?
One love alone for thee revolts no heart..
A husband ne'er assailed by human laughter,
Who oft, may be, enjoys his laugh apart.

The jealousy of deeply biased nature
Him only will allow; of vague report,
Gay, sad, obscene, severe, the unknown feature
Torments less than apparent falling-short.

Embraced by Death, contented with thy lover,
We shall behold thee, lost to us, serene;
Nor fear to jar thy peace or to discover
Some drear regret's pale silence-claiming mien.

Though circumstances sleek as robes of ermine,
With sword, with crown, with jewelled, poisoned cup,
With blood poured out our tragic moods determine,
Thy naked corpse shall fill their measure up.

II. ESPOUSED

SHOULD tedious nights of avid pain succeed
That nuptial treachery, while left alone
Thou dost surmise how sleepless hours speed
(Plagued by importunate visions past thy need)
With him whose way with women thou hast known?

Before thy glass, dragged by Dawn's earliest rigour,
Set'st thou thy livid charms' entire reproach
Beside some phantom of unscrupulous vigour,
Usurping double of thy shrinking figure,
And there too wanest before its loathed approach?

Canst conjure up what accent, gesture, glance
May best on purchasers at market tell,
Touch lost with grandeur grave that did enhance
Thine April's mood? 'Tis faith's extravagance
To track false husbands thus to their choice hell.

What company for thee, that didst commune
With every radiant morning's eager face?
Thou, so severe to self-indulgent noon,
More choice of bower than is despotic June
Whom flowers find hard to please.. for thee what place?

Now rarely halted as by Angel's greeting,
Encounterest thou Illusion long since dead..
How from the world through intimacies retreating,
At last with heart, thy heart's rapt equal meeting,
Each should prove each all that their hopes had wed!

O Hardly-used, part company with thieves;
Let gracious limbs dictate thy bearing; press
On hot night-searèd eyes fresh dewy leaves;
Commit thee to thy beauty! Nothing grieves

That is itself; thy worth once more confess!

“We wed impurity and are not pure”

Plead poison-mastered brain and pulse. “Then, why
Hear this fair body preach? She knows no cure,
But must give birth at length if she endure...”

“To my child.. Yea and *his*; would she might die!”

A FATHER HAVING LOST A SON SIX
YEARS OLD

MY thoughts aver, thou canst not stir
That darling head,
Nor, half-awake, peep from unfinished dreams
Into this April day
Which, bright and vacant, seems
A long room for thy play;
Since thou art dead.

A week ago, thou wast aglow
With lambent youth;
I heard thy fresh mind sally into speech,
Attempt a tale and find
No words: we both laughed, each
To what was nearing blind.
I own the truth,

Thousand of times Death hath young children caught
And shall again slay others;
I do not fly the thought
Of those poor fathers, mothers;
I vaunt not that elsewhere shorn threads re-knit:
My thoughts contend, "Here is an end,"
And I submit.

THE CAGE

AH, tedious is the ocean's face, where ever
AHoarse billow surges after futile billow
Or hypocrite Peace, alluringly for pillow,
Accepts a glassy calm as though to assever
Implicit faith! O trust aught else, yet never
That mirrored sapphire of an innocent heaven..
Promise dishonoured millions of times seven,
Purred by a Harpy ravishing as clever.
Eh! snug and homely would the dark hours be,
Without those stars which riddle them with light
Lost in illimitable liberty!
The mind divines too much that baffles sight
In gaol so vast... Oh! how can thought feel free
Where ignorance glitters like a frosty night?

TO A CHILD LISTENING TO A REPEATER

HOW long, mad child, thou rosy whirligig,
HMust ticking Time enchant that careless head
Like watch in timber near a snorer's bed?
As gnat, that lovers heed not, leaves a twig,
Floats round them armed to pierce her cheek, his neck,
The future threatens bliss: as javelin sped
Has changed king's laughing guest to one struck dead,
So insect tune may prelude final wreck.
Pleasure will like a morning mist trail off;
Hopes which seemed certain coming, near shall fade;
And Pain or Grief, like shadow grown distinct,
Lurk at thy feet, nay, climb the wall to scoff
'Gay still?' and, having o'er thy shoulder winked,
When Fate cries 'Time!' shall hug thee to a shade.

ELECTION

COME, worship all who pay the world its price!
Charm to a mounting wave of present smiles,
Busy dispensers of confectioned wiles,
Who keep the truth's avowal fresh on ice
In well-locked safes! For gardens of pure spice
On coral-ringed, still undeflowered isles,
Whose produce dreams not of accountant files,
And tempts alone the bird of paradise,
Are myths enormous as an empty sky,
Mirages poised in serpent-ocean's gleam,
That, before dolt who swim against the stream,
Dangle the cheap perfections of a lie,
Lure to their fond wits' fabulous sick dream,
Let those, deceived thus, shipwreck, starve and die!

SPEECH

I SAID "Mean aims, as fiends possess a witch,
I Bemumble the shrewd brain until it trust
Eloquence, cadger for immediate lust,
Clouder of thought, relief of folly's itch,
. Or dungy road, contaminated ditch,
Nay, more confineless, cloud of city dust
Which poisons food and taints intent though just..
Yet, pursy with fat phrases, men feel rich."
Whose voice then cried "Song's bread! and Wisdom's home!
Wind of your rush deliverance affords
And wakes the sea of doom with tips of foam
That laugh at death, O winged and laden words,
You hive in heaven, pulse the ethereal dome
With brandished meteors flashed from healing swords!"?

MARIAMNE

THE CHARACTERS
HEROD THE GREAT, KING OF JUDEA
ANANEL, HIGH PRIEST
CASTOBAR, CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD
SOHEMUS OF ITUREA, GOVERNOR OF
THE ALEXANDRIUM
SAMEAS (or SHEMAIAH), CHIEF RABBI
HEROD'S CUPBEARER
PUPILS, COURTIERS, GUARDS, EUNUCHS,
GREEKS AND OFFICERS
MARIAMNE, QUEEN OF JUDEA
ALEXANDRA, HER MOTHER
CYPROS, MOTHER OF HEROD
SALOME, HEROD'S SISTER
MIRIAM, MARAH, REBECCA, HEPSIBAH,
NAOMI, ATTENDANTS ON THE QUEEN
AN ARAB GIRL AND OTHER SERVANTS

ACT I

The courtyard of the Alexandrium, surrounded by fortifications in many parts only temporarily restored since their demolition by Gabinius. Right, the outer gate. Left, steps lead up into the castle; from within SOHEMUS is heard in earnest conversation with ALEXANDRA. They issue at the top of the steps and his words become audible:

He has been near his death a thousand times,
And is so rash, he must be caught at last;
The Jews who love thy daughter, hate him; wait.

ALEXANDRA

Wait while she ruins all? She will not come
To give him welcome.

SOHEMUS Will not come?

ALEXANDRA Not she:

Obsessed by knowing he would have her slain
If he himself died, she must flaunt her hate
Full in his face.

SOHEMUS [musing] That is not wise.

ALEXANDRA

She has no policy; a child has more!

[CASTOBAR enters through the gate. His commands to the soldiers whom he has been drilling have echoed occasionally across the scene.]

SOHEMUS [indicating the newcomer's bearing]

This Idumean Castobar swims in the news.

[ALEXANDRA shrugs her shoulders, then, turning, directs her WOMEN, who have joined her, to spread a carpet at the top of the steps, in the centre, and to keep a long-handled parasol over her as the sun is hot. SOHEMUS descends and meets CASTOBAR.]

CASTOBAR [waggishly]

Good Sohemus, I thought the King was dead?

SOHEMUS [gravely]

So many thought, but God in heaven be praised...

CASTOBAR

Ay, God in heaven and...? valour on the earth!

SOHEMUS

'Tis Idumean, Sir, to halve God's praise.

CASTOBAR Right! it is so; our Herod's Idumean,
And halves it, Jew.

SOHEMUS With us 'tis blasphemy.

CASTOBAR

Ungenerous Jew, not backward wouldest thou be
In David's praise; why not in Herod's then?

SOHEMUS [taking him by the arm and walking
with him] You think, because the Roman is our friend,
The fanatics will moderate their rage.

I was not born a Jew, no more than Herod,
No, nor thyself; but I, to serve my King,
Seem what I seem; and wouldest thou serve him, speak
As though Shemaiah had thy note of hand,
Was at thine elbow, must be pacified.

[He gives him a gentle push toward the gate whither
he has led him.]

CASTOBAR [going out] Damn Jews,
And, saving soldiers, damn all kinds of men!

[**SOHEMUS** rejoins the QUEEN.]

ALEXANDRA

Now counsel me on present means and ends:
Should we not strive to please him all we can?
Give him such welcome as shall blind his eyes?
Salome and proud Cypros will be here,
Their litters have been watched along the road;
And, had I not secured the vantage ground,
They would seem first to welcome Herod home:
Which must not be and shall not.

SOHEMUS Herod will look
For welcome... will be pleased to meet it... If
Thy daughter grants her not...

ALEXANDRA Childish fool!

SOHEMUS Yet, if she will not come, it may be best
His sister and his mother here alone
Salute his advent.

ALEXANDRA Sohemus, how so?

SOHEMUS Queen,

His love will leave them slighted on these steps;
Till she is in his arms he will not pause;
Fully two years it is since they have met;
His gifts sent on prove his impatience hot;
Shouldst thou be with them and scarce heeded too,
The aspersion thou wouldest share.

ALEXANDRA Be the whole theirs!...

SOHEMUS

Yet quit thou not the steps before they come.

ALEXANDRA

How! must I serve for target to their gibes?

SOHEMUS

But should they crowd thee from thy station, Queen,
(Which in thy daughter's absence well may be),
'Twould both excuse thee and discomfit them
Reported, later on, to Herod's ear.

ALEXANDRA Right, right!

It shall so, if I own a woman's tongue!

Behold, they come. Thou, Sohemus, go forth,
Meet him upon the road, prepare his mind
For Mariamne's sullen-browed caprice.

[SOHEMUS descends, passes the PRINCESSES as they enter with gestures of profound salutation, and goes out through the gate. The GROOMS take the mules and litters round behind the castle; while CYPROS and SALOME mount slowly with their parasols, EUNUCHS and WOMEN. When they arrive where ALEXANDRA stands in front of her women, she turns]

Now, girls, be not so simple as to budge;
These Queens have not so good a right as we.

—Ho, gently there!—Cypros, control thy knave;
He elbows this young girl.—Rough wretch, stand
back! [She strikes the EUNUCH, who gives way.]
CYPROS Nay, Alexandra, thou shalt give us place.

ALEXANDRA

I will not, Cypros; we are of the house,
And room there is on either hand of us.

CYPROS We are more numerous; thou hast no men.
But we have brought sufficient.

[To her EUNUCHS, indicating ALEXANDRA'S
women] Carry them to one side.

SALOME [after watching the EUNUCHS com-
mence struggling with the women]

Ha, Alexandra, thou art left alone!

Call forth thy daughter's eunuchs! Where is she?

CYPROS

Knows she her mother doth sustain affront?

SALOME [advancing right on to ALEXANDRA]

Madam, thou surely wilt not here persist

Dissevered from thy train?

I thank thee for thy place.

ALEXANDRA [retreating] Cypros,
My daughter loves me more than's in thy race
To yield affection parent, child, or wife.

CYPROS

My son's blood is too cool? 'Tis scandal only
Founds his uxorious fame! He hath a mistress;
Men never are so fond in wedlock. Sooth,
I will be angry at the next reproach
Directed 'gainst his wife-spoiling. No, no,
He's more the man than to be satisfied
With one proud yellow Jewess.

ALEXANDRA [while an ARAB GIRL slips round
the castle, and joins CYPROS' train] Cypros, rail!
I leave thee in possession of the steps.

Herod will wait upon me where thy slaves
Shall not find entrance.

CYPROS [turning to her train, as ALEXANDRA enters the palace] How is it Mariamne comes not forth? [ONE OF THOSE who have received the GIRL and helped to disguise her with shawls]

Madam, here is the Arab girl, whom thou
Contrivedst to get placed i' th' kitchen suite.

[They push the GIRL forward.]

CYPROS

Why comes the Queen not forth?

ARAB GIRL [speaking glibly] Most noble lady,
Nothing touched her; all has been sent in vain:
Most wonderful apparel bought in Rhodes!

One fall was of a tissue light as air!

And there were pattens mother-of-pearl inlaid!

And, priceless, wholly made of fine white wool,
So soft it seemed to flow like cream, not fold,

A chlamys fashioned to Athenian taste!

The Roman purple, so her women said,
Becomes her swarthy caste of countenance
To such perfection, that it makes them sigh

To think that she refused to put it on.

Nor would she scarcely glance at graven stones,

Which are a scandal to these Jewish girls,

Because of naked idols on them wrought

That do deceive the eye, they seem so human,

So fit for life, and formed to satisfy,

Though tiny! tiny!

CYPROS Peace!.. But Mariamne?

ARAB GIRL O madam, Mariamne wears to-day
What every day she wears, and that not queenly!
She hath grown so neglectful of herself
Since first she heard that Herod lived, though false
Report had noised his death. She loves him not:

Nor hath she really, so her women hold,
Since first she learnt from Joseph, four years back,
How Herod had provided, should he die,
That she must thereupon be put to death ..

Although this Joseph was a councillor,
And did protest that Herod's very love
Was the true cause of that ferocious purpose!

Her wrath is trebled now; for Sohemus
Received the same command as Joseph had,
To have her slain, should the king lose his life.

'Tis thought she will estrange him utterly;
Since she hath never practised to conceal
Her every humour, cross him how they might!
But, madam, still, they say such gifts do prove
That love has grown with absence on his side;
And yet they tremble for the Queen, whom all
Love dearly; for her goodness is to them
As marked as is her humour toward her Lord.

SALOME [signing to the girl to fall back]
Her pride surpasseth Jezebel's.

ARAB GIRL [before obeying] Your pardon,
I have forgot the strangest act of all ..
She packed her children off, ere day was light,
To Maccheroos.

CYPROS Madness!

ARAB GIRL I speak the truth.

SALOME [waving the girl off once more]
Enough.

CYPROS She flouts my son. If he support it
I will disown my part in him.

SALOME Hark! Hark!
The trumpets which announce my brother near!
He will expect to find here wife and children;
Which disappointment should enhance our kindness.
[HEROD, attired in purple, enters through the gate,

followed by SOHEMUS, CASTOBAR, COURTIERS, GREEKS, and GUARDS.]

CYPROS Herod, thy mother bids thee welcome.

SALOME Thy sister

Welcomes her brother, Herod.

CYPROS We rejoiced

To hear of all thy Roman honours, son.

HEROD

Health to thee, mother... but I seek my Queen!

—Salome, is not Mariamne here?

SALOME O Herod, fortunate in every sort!

Most fortunate that of his wife men say..

Even the gloomy Pharisees have said,

She is the Rose of Sharon! They say well;

Most favoured art thou, that it should be so:

Yet only in his wife can it be said

Of Herod, that he much deserveth pity.

CYPROS My son, thy former Doris had been here.

She was as we are, Idumean born,

And not a stiff-necked Jewess.

HEROD What is this?

Let me pass on! [looking about]

Are not our children here?

Mine heir, prince Alexander, where is he?

CYPROS

Their mother hurried them to Maccheroos

Only this morning.

SALOME Duteous preparation,

For thy return!

[getting in front of his astonishment and continuing
with a scornful mimicry of the QUEEN]

Thus she received thy gifts:

“I have too many robes and could be pleased

With just a queen’s attire. The concubine

Needs quilted jackets.. must be hitched aloft

On ebony clogs inlaid with mother-of-pearl:
The veil, that floats five minutes in the air
Before it reach the ground, is not too light
For one who, like a feather, by caprice
Is puffed above a monarch's head; there floats;
There trembles, smiled on, talked to; afterwards
Is swept up with the dust.. as Doris was.
Doris lives somewhere in the rubbish still,
Take her these things!"

CYPROS

Discarding even the gossamer tissue thus!

HEROD

O mother, that thou hat'st my wife, I know:
—And sister, thou hadst got a ready tongue
Upon this theme, before I went from hence.
—Ye do impede me; pray remove your arms;
I am in haste, and fear I owe to you
This cold reception; for ye cross the Queen
Whose inborn humour brooks with little enough,..
[reaching the top of the steps and looking down on
them, he stamps]
But, were she patient as these pavement stones,
I know ye would not relish rest before
The limit of that sufferance were passed.
I pray ye to give welcome to my friends;
Since I must labour to undo what ye
Have wrought so kindly in my household here.
[He goes in alone.]

CYPROS [turning to the crowd]

This must a mother bear that hath conceived
A King by native gift raised to the clouds.

[before she mounts the last few steps to go in]

Good friends, I pray you, follow to the hall.

[When the steps are wholly covered by the backs of
the crowd swarming up, the CURTAIN comes rapidly
down.]

ACT I. SCENE II.

Before curtains SALOME, meeting the ARAB GIRL:
Ha! little villain, we succeed!

SALOME

Rein in thy tongue; and never dull mine ear
With vows or thanks; I know what both are worth...
Was any man among the better sort
Of Herod's foreign friends...

ARAB GIRL Any man?

SALOME

Neither too young nor old to be my husband?
A widow of my years would laugh at a boy
Though not yet ripe for a second grizzled Joseph...
Revenge must help me to forget the fool,
Who, though my husband, absurdly was accused...
He sleep with the Queen!

My charms were more than he had stomach for!

Yet as the doll was mine

Whose head was Heroded off without a trial,
I need to see the Queen's head roll on cobbles...

[seeing the GIRL about to speak]

Wait your cue, I marked not, wholly absorbed
In torturing my brother to have him mad,
What man with brains came with these foreigners?
What handsome politician ... Thine eyes are read;
Spoil not their vacant clearness with pretended
Thought ... Menial, tell of this menial lover
Corrupter of Eunuchs, this cup-bearer
Who trifles with some woman of the Queen's?

THE ARAB GIRL

Princess, two men go halves to buy old Tubal,
The cup-bearer and the captain of the guard...

SALOME

We stifle here.. I'll try the gardens.. Come! [Exeunt]

CURTAIN

ACT II

MARIAMNE'S apartment in the Alexandrium. It opens to the south towards Jerusalem, between carved columns of algumin wood, upon a gallery over which an awning of violet cloth slopes out like eaves, and is supported by two slanting poles. These rest on the gallery rail and are corded to the feet of the columns; from the centre and towards the left stairs, in which the gallery terminates, descend to the gardens, while luxuriant tree tops are visible over this and beneath the awning fringe. The bed, which is slung in a frame carved and painted after the Egyptian manner, is enclosed by curtains of lawn; it stands on the left, leaving a narrow passage between its head and the wall of the apartment. In front on the same side is a doorway closed by a curtain. On the right, half-way between the pillars and the front, is a second door with folding leaves of cedar wood. Beside this stand two large vases of water with basins to dip, and a great variety of slippers, pattens, sandals, etc. In the centre at the foot of the bed is a carpet on which are two ebony stools. The bed-curtains are so diaphanous that two crowns are visible upon the pillows.

When the curtain rises the scene is empty.

HEROD enters through the folding doors; he looks round, and claps his hands.

OLD TUBAL [an eunuch, entering after him]

Hail to my lord the King!

HEROD [turning] Where is the Queen?

TUBAL

My lord, she hath descended to the bath.

[HEROD strides out through the curtained doorway on the left, and TUBAL returns through the folding doors. After a minute or two MARIAMNE and MIRIAM come up the stairs from the garden; they are out of breath and have been running. MAR-

MARIAMNE is dressed in a long white simar; her hair is down and still wet.]

MIRIAM [who is similarly dressed, carries towels, and speaks with assumed cheerfulness]

He did not see us turn along the wall,
Therefore will search the gardens, and the more
That thou dost ever haunt them: this he knows;
For he knows all thy ways. We shall have time
For such a toilette as becomes a Queen.

MARIAMNE [placing a fuchsia spray she has brought in from the gardens between her lips, claps her hands impatiently: then as TUBAL enters, says, pointing with the spray]

Hasten my girls; they loiter at the bath.

[TUBAL crosses the stage and passes the curtain. The QUEEN sits down.]

MIRIAM [drying Mariamne's hair]

They will be here anon: I bade them hold
The King in parley at the inner door.

MARIAMNE

He hunts me, hunts me; violent doth stretch across

• His but-imagined grave, to slay me there,
The widowed mother of his little ones...

In case death seize him, this is his command,

My life.. his children's mother's life.. be taken!

With policy! cold forethought! thus he thwarts

The monster that his jealous dreams paint large,

My second husband... which should I forget,

I must demean me like a serving maid,

Thy fellow, not thy mistress.

[The WOMEN enter through the curtain left: they are dressed in white simars and carry huge baskets piled with clothes or towels.]

MARIAMNE

Quick, girls, my mourning robes! and find me those
I for my brother wore!

[shutting her eyes and pressing the leaves of the fuchsia against them] Aristobulus,
Brother, O let thy beauty flood my sight;
Thy death he compassed and not planned alone!

[looking up]

Thy murderer comes!

[turning to the women, who with the help of GEHAZI and other EUNUCHS have brought in five or six chests through which they are rummaging]

How now! So many chests?

MIRIAM

I cannot call to mind in which they are.

MARIAMNE

Make haste, make haste!

MIRIAM This key must have got bent.

HEPSIBAH

Perchance it fits this.

MARIAMNE Come, how slow ye are!

[plaiting the fuchsia into her hair]

Oh, to begin again!

[taking up a mirror] I thought he had been dead.

The rumours made it probable..but lo!

I still am Herod's wife.—Poor wretched fool,

Thy beauty saves the shame of many a smile

Which else 'twould be thy lot to simulate.

Thy brother's murderer's wife!

[Tosses the mirror aside.]

To think that as my husband he is king

Though none by birth! Yes, crowned, and by my hand

Armed, and with power I lend. One who has slain

My brother and grandfather, he commands

This bed and my fidelity.

[crunching up the spray] O God,

And canst thou see, and not be moved to wrath?

MIRIAM

Behold the very robe, lustreless black.

HEPSIBAH [coming forward from the gallery,
while the QUEEN hurriedly drapes herself]
The King doth mount the stairs.

MARIAMNE Leave us alone, but be within our call.
[They go out on the left.]

HEROD [entering from the gallery]

Why, Mariamne, here's a wild-wood craze?

Wilt thou be hunted like the shy gazelle?

But what! what mean these doleful draperies!

This stiff averted bearing?

[He stops and muses a moment: then in a changed voice]

Queen of Judea,

Great princess of the house of Maccabees,

Right royal spouse, from Rhodes am I returned,

The friend of Cæsar, honoured by his hand

In cordial warmth as to an equal given:

And, since I have escorted him to Egypt

Providing water through the waste Peræa,

Commended by his lips with estimation

As much beyond my hopes as my desert.

And from Augustus to my Queen I bear

Gifts and exceeding honour.. Straton's Tower,

The site we coveted to build a city;

And Jericho with all her glorious palms,

Her shrubs that yield the balsam, and those pools

Called "Diamonds of the Desert"; add to this

Samaria, Gadara, Anthedon, Hippos!

Thou crown of all the Asmonean line,

Thy borders are restored.. restored? extended!

Gaza and Joppa, all the littoral,

Cities renowned and thriving marts and ports

Wherein the west doth traffic with the east,

Accessions most momentous to thy realm.

And I, that am the steward of thy wealth,

The husband of thine honour, here present

True tables of the increase come to hand.

[holding out his tablets]

Thy wealth, see, trebled; while thine honour stands
Higher than ever erst: but clearer yet
On tables of my heart I bear inscribed
The profit of swift thoughts that passed like ships
Athwart the flood to thee, and made return
Laden with wondrous gains, .. and now I kneel
With all a proffered tribute to thy joy.

[a pause, then rising with sudden anger]

Our children ... why are not my children here?

[then mastering himself again]

Thou think'st to show thy power over me,
Treating me thus! These mourning robes attest
More lightness in thy mind, than my forbearance
Can speak that love of thee which holds my chafe...

Why, every father yields as good a proof
To his child's pettish humour every year,
As this thou dost exact with pains so great.

[A silence; then in softer tones he continues, and stooping to lift the spray of fuchsia]

See, thus must flowers suffer from a storm:
The bloom of life from anger suffers thus:
Something is lost! Or may this thought be truer,
That as the balsam will alone yield gum
To violence, when the sharp jagged flints are struck
Deep through the bark, and golden drops collect..
Harsh is the treatment needful ere true hearts
Shall yield their balm, more costly than the best
That trickles priceless from so rare a shrub?

[Kissing the hem of her robe he pauses; then starting up and back, paces the room, dragging the scattered robes with his feet and spurning them.]

These robes, that here lie scattered, these are not
The robes I sent thee! Where are those I sent?
It had not been so virtuous thus arrayed
(Though more to please thy husband than thyself),

To welcome me!

[He stands still; then, trying to control himself]
Thou wilt not speak; how can I learn the fault,
Which in this entertainment meets award..
Just, it may be?

Canst thou appoint some third
Who may expound our quarrel?

Mariamne,

Has there some lying scandal altered thee?
Have I been wronged? O speak! Hast thou been
wronged?
Thou art but young: I will not blame thee, speak!
Come, come, I must insist: when thou dost feel
These loving, strong and comfortable arms
Protect thee, thou wilt yield thy secret up.
I do remember how I found thine eyes
Behind this veil, more lovely after tears!

[Having put his arms round her, he draws the veil
from off her face: she averts her eyes and groans. He
breaks from her and rushes out by the staircase.]

MARIAMNE [left alone, sinking back on one of the
stools, sighs] Little enough, little enough, I then
Thought that to die in happiness was bliss!
Oh that they had but made us prisoners
When, from Antigonus and the Parthians, we
Toiled through the desolate land in waggons jerked!
Better it must have been had he then died,
And we, the prey of heathen archers, fallen
Deep in dishonourable servitude.

Rather than lived, him whom we loved to know
More savage, more defiling than such foes!

[She bows down her head and is silent.]

ALEXANDRA [entering through the curtain]
Ha! truly, Mariamne, thou art mad!
Dost want to see thy mother's severed head
Roll on the courtyard stones? or dost thou choose

Instant decapitation now to end
Thy troubles, patience judged as not worth while?
I met thy tyrant; murder on his face
Was stamped, as on a warrant his great seal
In red and seething wax, and am informed
Of how thou hast received him, childish fool!

MARIAMNE

Mother, what mean these words? since thou thyself
Didst prove me, it was clean impossible
To hold my husband guiltless or to yield him,
As I had done, the utmost benefit
Of what doubt still remained? Thou didst upbraid
Smile, kiss or anxious thought, whatever I
Have yielded Herod, as implying nothing
But base impiety towards my brother:
And this not once, but every day!

ALEXANDRA

Alack!

In what have I deserved so blind a child?
The women of our house have been, till now,
Commended for rare politic insight:
Dost thou not know our lives are in his hand?
A word can end us, child!

MARIAMNE

Alas, I know.

ALEXANDRA

O thou dost know! It is the grace of God
If thou dost understand.

MARIAMNE

What can I do?

ALEXANDRA

What canst thou do? Why, thou canst save my life!
A smile or two: even to add a kiss,
Where thou hast squandered thousands, were but little
To save thy mother!

MARIAMNE

Little?

His murderer?

ALEXANDRA This would show well enough,
Had he been by Augustus taken off,

Or with his credit shattered had returned,
(Which things were lively hoped): if then thou hadst
Repudiated Herod and his deeds,
No fault could have been found; but now, since all
Strengthens his hold upon our hapless land,
Since that his crown is set more firmly on
Than ere before, since with him now he brings
Roman decrees endorsed by Roman legions,
Since thou and I may certainly expect
To see all friends who promised us their aid
Lie quiet and seem unconcerned in aught
That doth affect us .. we must, knowing this,
Be all the help unto ourselves we can.
His passion for thee is our only shield,
And this wouldst thou destroy! Come, come, more sense!
At thy best speed send humbly for the King
And win him with thy cunningest address;
Think, certainly, Salome is at work!
Good Sohemus now stands where Joseph stood;
For his sake be thou speedy! Cypros, too,
She will be stinging her dear son's hot mind with
Rank lies, the nettle-crop of arrogance!

MARIAMNE

Mother! thou art persuading me almost
That thou didst never credit his contriving
Aristobulus' death, and that thou hast
By nothing else been moved but mere ambition.

ALEXANDRA

I ... been by nothing moved, my son cut off..
My crown upon my daughter's head disgraced!

MARIAMNE

How couldst thou entertain so vile a thought,
That I should prostitute or lip or body
Unto my brother's murderer again?

ALEXANDRA This is no season for a show of virtue!
Believe, if it consoles thee thus to do,

Him blameless quite, whilst thou art in his power.
But think at once of friends who risk their lives
Upon the tiptoe grandeur of thy pride..
On the imperious crossing of those brows
And the pinched wilful silence of ripe lips;
For time to play this pretty masquerade,
My life, and that of Sohemus, is pledged!
Think, mistress, on these plain impressive facts !
I ne'er had dreamed, imagination-struck,
Thou couldst have gone such lengths in their despite,
Lost in this grand performance of thy pride !

MARIAMNE Alas, alas, have I no friends at all?

ALEXANDRA

It likes thee little to regard them such.

MARIAMNE But did he plan Aristobulus' death?

ALEXANDRA

Come, ask him and believe him; for my credit,
I fear, is fallen in my daughter's eyes !

MARIAMNE

O mother, tell me, what dost thou believe?

ALEXANDRA

Convinced I am, thou hast dire need to love him,
And best be speedy with some proof thou dost,
If Sohemus thou prizest or thy mother.

There is no time to lose! Bah! take this style,
Here are thy tablets .. write.

[She claps her hands and TUBAL enters.]

[MARIAMNE writes and then bows her face into
her hands.]

ALEXANDRA

Here, slave, take these at once unto the King,
And yield them, mind you, to no hand but his!

[Exit TUBAL followed by ALEXANDRA.]

MARIAMNE [left alone]

O Lord, give light unto my groping eyes!

Herod was noble, and I loved him well;

Didst thou not make him beautiful and strong,
Drape him with majesty and give that air
The lion hath, anointing him with might?
And in his oft-tried heart didst thou not place
The fervency of long-enduring love,
Tuning his lips like magic to my soul,
Entrancing all my softness in a spell?

—But how can I believe that what was, is?

[rising]

At least, while doubt may still be entertained,
Let me not be unjust. Though all were proved,
The worst, has there not been excuse for that?
Has my contentious mother ever failed
To yield him exculpation full as far
As forceful circumstance can exculpate?
Aristobulus was to her intents
No better than a drawn and brilliant sword,
Wherewith she threatened Herod every month:
Could he unbroken wrest it from her hand?
His crime is then excused as self-defence.
Has she not used e'en me to mar his peace?

[with gathering animation]

Her grandam, as she never can forget,
An Alexandra, ruled for full nine years..
This constitutes her right to Herod's crown!
Because my father was the King .. because
Herod, than whom no man more born to rule,
As she admits, has praised her subtle mind..
Because hers is the Asmonean blood,
Why, she has been seditious, steeped in plots!
Yet Herod has entreated me ignobly
By this command that I should straight be slain
If from Augustus he should fail of grace;
This man, that after Joseph's death, did swear,
Drenching my hands in tears, with broken accents,
Never to give again such vile commands..

Or me again accuse
As he had dared accuse...

[HEROD enters and she turns to face him.]

Now, I will speak.

I am the Queen of Israel by birth,
In line direct from Simon Maccabæus,
Fifth regent of the Asmonean house;
And thou from me derivest thy best claim.

[HEROD makes as though he would answer, which
she arrests with]

Pray hear me first!

Thou hast no trust, because thou hast no honour!
Thine actions still confirm my mother's cries;
Aristobulus may right well have perished
By order of a man that pays for spies
To overreach his wife.

[HEROD as before: and the QUEEN]

I have not done.

I can speak aptly; thou art proud of me!
Wit, wit! why, Cleopatra had as much,
Which Antony did love belike as well!
A brace of names that are a byword now.
Is wit and beauty, beauty, wit and crown,
My sum and total told? Beauty I have,
But, noble that I am, I do not boast;
My thought was beautiful before my speech;
My heart was overflowing ere my lips.

“Man, like a man, still thinks to promise easy”
Which dictum, trust me, widely though it hold,
Holds not for those who, ere they utter vow,
Have curbed their whole souls to one great desire..
Even to serve for their love's sake a man
Less noble as to blood, pure as to birth
Than were themselves or were their ancestors.
But 'tis no service, slavery it is
That will content thee! Think of Love:

To be beforehand with most awful Time
Love binds a wet cloth round her aching brow,
As I have bound, to wait thy messengers
Sent from the wars, and watched the whole night long.
Love, calm in spite of danger, answers need
Prepared and helpful.

[holding out both hands to arrest his protestations]

But there! I speak to Herod, whose ear sings
With cries of poison, lust and perjury,
All which foul crimes inhabit one whom he
Pretends to love despite them all. Strange Love!
A king, thou art not ill: an actor, Sir,
So sorry, Wonder weeps to watch thee fail.
Thou dost not love me; own that and be cured;
Thou lov'st to dream thyself madly in love,
But dost impose on none except thyself.

HEROD

I swear I love thee, and not least when thus
Thy blood doth seethe, for thou art voluble
As at no other time;
Thine eloquence expands;
Thy beauty lightens, while thy voice discovers
Not my faults only, but its own rich range.
Yet jealousy... hast thought upon its cause?
Of what 'tis token? and from whence it springs?

MARIAMNE

Too much, too much. But thou hast told me tales
Of cunning Greeks, who have writ manners so,
That common men now step into the garb
Of kings and queens passed nobly long agone,
Mistakingly beheld, applauded even
For deeds, which once required costlier blood
Through lavish wounds poured out. This, with some paint
And heightened socks, the scum of Greece effects.

I marvel not; yet think my royal eyes
Had scarcely been content, nor my hands warmed

With genial claps of praise, since thou thyself,
Augustus' friend, canst not hit off the king,
As nature prompts me ask to have it done.

HEROD

Thy scorn's not just...

MARIAMNE

I dared no longer trust our children near thee
Since thou hadst strangled welcome in my heart
And, once thou art thwarted, who can say what crime
Thy frenzy would stop short at.

HEROD

How? What crime!

MARIAMNE

Coldly my death was planned.. coldly my brother's
Compassed! both grandfather and Joseph dropped
Under thy sudden accesses of rage.

HEROD

I am quite guiltless of thy brother's death!
Thou dost forget thy mother's plots! ... Canst not
Dream how suspicion of a rival tortures?

MARIAMNE

Thy common jealousy degrades thy crown.

HEROD My jealousy has passed away, years since.

MARIAMNE

Beheading one old man made thee secure?

HEROD

Of whom have I been jealous since that date?

MARIAMNE

Methinks I still am kept like miser's gold.

HEROD To whom have I denied access to thee?

MARIAMNE

Remember Joseph's death; thou art returned,
Thy native gifts may make thee royal thus
A second time.

I tremble, Sir, for grey-haired Sohemus.

HEROD

My hands were bound; the posture of affairs

Precluded much that willingly I would
For thee have done. The Alexandrium
I do admit a prison, yet secure;
Thou and thy mother have lived safely here!
Besides, thou hadst the choice of Maccheroos
And might at will dwell either here or there.
My life and my authority so poised
Upon the point of hazard,
How could I trust thy mother more at large,
Or thee, my bride, within Salome's reach?
Be gentle, for thy steward did his best.

MARIAMNE

Herod, might but my heart feel sure of that!
Yet of one thing take note: my mother, Sir,
Shall ne'er again be privy to my mind.
It is the doubt I can but entertain
(The fatal influence of her restless schemes
May have been more in our calamities
Than thine ambition or unscrupulous acts)
That makes me seek this interview with thee,
 Howe'er the colour of thine actions lower.

HEROD My Mariamne, what great joy is this!

MARIAMNE My lord, a little wait: an hour since
I hated thee, with all my heart I did.

It may be well to prelude yet our peace.

[She claps her hands, then to MIRIAM who enters]

Fetch me those robes my lord hath latest sent
And bid my tirewomen wait at once;

And pack these chests and see them put away.

[She throws off the mourning robe and veil. Exit
MIRIAM]

HEROD This is my Queen!

[He turns and kicks the robes together towards the
chests. MIRIAM returns with her WOMEN and
EUNUCHS who commence packing while the
QUEEN is being arrayed.]

HEROD [with rhetorical parade]

Gowns, gowns, their service done,
The habits of past time; black mourning robes,
White festal raiment, radiant, striped with gold;
Pelusian linen .. filled with beauty once
And now, like vacant dwellings, caving inwards:
—Your folds are speechless; front me ye cannot,
Though once informed with pride, though flaunting
once

An accidental bravery. Fleered at prayers,
Did ye? Limp sleeves whisked ye away from touches
That plead? So go those moods ye served.—My Queen,
Disdain and pride are rent and cast aside;
Aloofness falls; discarded must spite be,
For love upholds the vital part of life
That walks into the future, and love's wardrobe
Is courtesy, staid gentleness and hope
That smiles and helps, and happy confidence,
Glowing contentment, rainbow-hued resolves..
High Virtue's vesture
These that outlast change
Life must return to:

Perennial fashions they!

MARIAMNE

Herod, believe thy words!

And I will trust them.

HEROD Doubt'st thou their bravery?
Frank colours are of truth.

MARIAMNE Enough, enough,
Wit's but half wise.

HEROD I have engaged some Greeks,
Philosophers approved and rhetoricians,
Who can discourse divinely and debate;
They will afford thee frequent entertainment
Recounting famous deeds betid of yore
In Greece and Rome. I mean them to instruct

In all august accomplishments our sons.

MARIAMNE My lord, a learned Alexandrian Jew
Has oft beguiled my leisure this past winter,
And showed me how the Grecian wisdom springs
From Moses or Melchizedek, perchance,
And is a sister branch unto our own,
Deserving all esteem and recognition.
But while I think of it, good Sohemus
Has, in solicitude for our best welfare,
Fast bound our gratitude; may I request,
That he obtain some fitting recompense?
HEROD Thy will shall be my pleasure.

MARIAMNE [displaying herself] How is this?

HEROD

Entrancing! The Queen of Sheba is surpassed.

MARIAMNE

This addereth is a well-worked pelisse.

HEROD 'Tis from Damascus, and, I deem, unique.
They tell me that bright seed used in the fringe
Comes from the land of Chittim, and the veil
That like a dew envelops thee in sheen
Is from Taprobana: it hallows thee!

MARIAMNE

Shall we walk forth, where the cool trees invite?

HEROD

By all means; noon grows heavy. Hark! an air
Freshens the alleys rustling.

[to an EUNUCH] Bid them pitch

My saffron tabernacle on the lawn

Beside the basin of the golden carp.

[EUNUCH salaams and goes out.]

HEROD [standing outside]

Jerusalem lies just beyond that ridge:

At last, Fortune and Peace permitting, I

Hope to rebuild her temple on a scale

More fit to crown the city of God's choice.

[As he and MARIAMNE descend a parasol is raised over them, and all the WOMEN and EUNUCHS flock down in their wake. When the scene is empty the CURTAIN descends.]

ACT III

MARIAMNE'S apartment, the same as in the last. A few clothes are still littered round the open chests. Outside, the tree tops are bathed in the noon blaze. When the curtain rises the scene is empty. But soon MARAH returns furtively up the stair; first glances back toward the gardens to make sure she has been unobserved, then, surveying the room, proceeds on tip-toe to the front and holds the curtain out from the doorway on the left; then begins to sing to a simple air:

Powder thy hair with dust as blue

As is the sky!

Tint thou thy nails with henna red

As heart's blood shed!

Streak in thy scanty eyebrows, do,

Legs of a fly!

Improve thy cheeks with painted guile,

And smile.. O smile!

Thou never wilt appear so sweet as I,

Nor win my love from me.

Beneath thy casement he will never sigh,

Nor, called, climb up to thee.

[HEROD'S CUPBEARER appears through the curtain, and, still holding it, she addresses him; while slowly SALOME mounts the staircase and, entering the room, draws near to them, keeping behind the bed.]

O Phanuel, what says my warlike Haman?

(Thy Hepsibah can think of nought but thee!)

Has Haman sent no present to his love?

(For speech with thee poor Hepsibah doth thirst!)

Did he not fill thy mouth with soothing words,

My tall Samaritan warrior, did he not?

(She oft had noted thee and, in her sleep,

Seen thee thereafter.) Speak of Haman first,

Then will I pay thine ears with Hepsibah.

Had he but entrance to the house himself

I'd sing him up the stairs and not need thee.

CUPBEARER

Hist, and take breath! An eunuch has been gained:

It is old Tubal; he will let you slip

(Both Hepsibah, my jewel, and yourself)

Down to the gardens on the first safe night;

And there thy Haman and myself will wait.

What said fair Hepsibah when first you spoke?

Was she inclined to hark, or hard to win?

I deem her youth all virgin, e'en in thought!

MARAH

She was afraid, and then she thought it wrong

Because the Queen so pets her: frowned and sighed

Yet still but blushed and listened, while I spoke

About thy grace and valour, youth and love..

How thou wast suited to her: I enlarged

The madness of thy passion.

SALOME [interrupting] This is well;

The Queen has honourable servants, troth!

[The woman lets the curtain swing back in the doorway and falls on her face before the PRINCESS, while the CUPBEARER kneeling says]

Most gracious Princess, thou art beautiful;

Must, therefore, know what power beauty wields;

Think gently, then, of those who feel its might.

MARAH [trembling and kissing the hem of the PRINCESS'S robe]

Pardon, dread Lady, pardon, pardon, pardon!

SALOME

Sometimes I need to know what the Queen thinks.

MARAH I swear to tell thee every word I hear.

SALOME

So be it. I will shield thee, whilst thou dost.

Be off unto the gardens, join the Queen!

[When the woman has gone out she turns suddenly on the CUPBEARER and seizing him by his dress cries]

Hark! Thou hast had philtres from the Queen.

CUPBEARER [in alarm]

Not I!

SALOME

Fool, thou must say so ... strange drugs
Hast thou, for years past, mixed in Herod's wine.
The Queen did tell thee they controlled his love,
And bound his faith to her
As passion only binds.
But boy, to-day, to-day, on his return,
She gave thee other drugs, a differing draught;
And, as she forced these on thee, looked so black,
That thou didst fear her present purpose was
To poison him! Therefore, thou, at his feet,
Wast saying that which now I say to thee.
Dost mark me? on thy life thou shalt say this,
Or I reveal thy business with this woman ...
How thou hast bought his eunuch ... how thou hast
Deserved the most dispiteous death he knows.
Thy terror makes thee totter: be a man!
Collect thy wits; thou shalt rehearse thy part!
Attend me in my closet shortly! Go!
[He goes out through the curtain.]
Fortune helps those who take her lightest hint;
My brother oft affirms it.—Prove him right;
Confirm thy favourite, Fortune! Light the hint
That I have seized in these two fools' loose love.
They merely plotted pleasure. They shall work—
Herod, the engine of my hate—and grind
Thee, Mariamne; slaves shall crumble thee
Beneath thy husband's hardened heart, and crush
Thy hopes as with a millstone; these slaves shall!
[She points derisively towards the bed.]
Poor Herod, sleep's thy chains, this muslin house
Thy prison—O strong walls!
[A scornful silence, then with deliberate triumph] I, I

Will free this wife-besotted brother, teach
Our mother fume is smoke but fire effective.
[MIRIAM is heard coming up from the garden.
When she enters SALOME, advancing towards her,
cries laughing]

Come, hold thy dress out!

[and herself catching it up so as to form a receptacle,
empties a purse into it] Deem'st thou this a bribe?

It is a gift. Think well of me, and thou
Shalt speak well too, which I confess I need.
Say what is in thy heart, I ask no more.

No words! come, tie these in thy kerchief, dolt!
And hide them quickly, for there are who come.

[The other women and eunuchs arrive: SALOME
advances to meet them with]

I came to see your mistress. Draws she nigh?
I go to meet her.

[She passes them and goes out.]

REBECCA Come, let us help the eunuchs to remove
These chests already filled.

NAOMI They are not locked.

MIRIAM [hurriedly composing her dress]

That's soon done!

[The EUNUCHS file through and out by the folding
doors: the WOMEN look at one another.]

MARAH

The Queen does well to trust her with those keys:
Her secrets too with her doth she confide,
Who here alone had speech with the Princess.

REBECCA

She hath been bribed; look how confused she is!

HEPSIBAH

Something she sought to hide as we came in!

NAOMI Her price is on her!

MIRIAM It is not true; you lie!

MARAH That's not like innocence!

NAOMI

Not in the least!

[REBECCA catches at her clothes; several closing round her begin to search her]

MIRIAM [angrily striking them with the keys]

The Queen shall hear of this!

[A scuffle is toward, when it is arrested by the entrance of the QUEEN, followed by SALOME, from the garden.]

MARIAMNE

Why wilt thou follow me, Princess? I need not
Thy proffered offices. I welcome not
This gust of friendship from an enemy
Whose deep contrition would be wasted time.

SALOME

Thy blindness cannot plumb thy needs, poor soul.

MARIAMNE Desist, desist.

[freeing her dress from SALOME'S hand]

Prefer an open hate to a pish love.

[coming forward to her women]

What meant the hubbub here? Is nowhere peace?

ALL [in one voice, standing off and looking askance at MIRIAM] Now, she must clear herself!

MIRIAM [after a pause]

They say I am a spy

[sobbing and throwing herself at MARIAMNE'S feet] ...but I am not!

Indeed, I am not! 'Tis themselves are bought!

SALOME Hark, Mariamne! when thy pride caves in,
Remember me, trapped Fool, remember me!

[Having cried this from the top of the stair she descends into the garden: her disappearance is followed by a painful silence.]

MARIAMNE No one has taken gold to serve me ill.

Come, not a word!

[sitting down]

Come, Miriam, weep no more; it was their fears

And not themselves, accused thee; souls in dread
Are dreadful to themselves. Yes, we are watched,
And we are listened to; for palace walls
Have always ears and eyes invisible:
Distrust will not protect us, but trust may.

To trust a foe is often to disarm one;
And friends are trusted, friendship being trust.
Fear haunts me: I have lent too ready an ear
To apprehensions and become their slave!

HEPSIBAH [whispering] O Marah, let's tell all.

MARAH

Tell what, thou fool? just dare one word; that's all!

MARIAMNE [vaguely conscious of the tone of
MARAH'S whisper]

Wrangle no more. Oh, is there nowhere peace!

I will doubt no one, for I need you all.

[with a gesture that seems to gather them round her as
for a confidence]

Friends, mark me, I, upon suspicion, have
Restrained my husband of his lawful right,
There in the tent, and roused his wrath once more,
By being bold to break my marriage vow
And set a stubborn will against my lord's.

—If I have sinned in this, O thou, still young
And honourably fearless still, though dead,
My brother's soul, reveal to me mine error!

[She presses her hands against her eyes.]

If in the fish-ponds, there, at Jericho
No human enemies, inhuman friends,
Lent aid to drown thee.. laughed to mock appeals
Thy last despair put piteously up...

O dead face, smile assurance or look thwart
And lower on this heart's ill-judged compunction!

[HEPSIBAH deliberately moves away from MARAH and kneels at the QUEEN'S feet, who, after a pause, frees her eyes with a despairing action.]

Not less are drugged, who sip suspicion's cup,
Than those whose wine was meddled with ; perhaps
Their friends appear like monsters vision-bred,
Their husbands may assume some nightmare shape ;
Stripped are they, then, of all relationship !
How naked is that soul which doubts of love !
Random accusers to protect mere life
They soon become who yield to mutual doubts ;
Forgetful of the best that they have known,
They will count all that made them love-worthy
For loss to save what, saved, can be no more
Than one mean undeserving friendless heart.
[looking down on HEPSIBAH and putting her arms
round her] Hepsibah, thou art sobbing, guileless child !
— This heart's a sample of your trusty hearts ;
Girls, I have not been often harsh with you.
HEPSIBAH [in a broken voice]
Never again, never again,
Will I send messages !
Indeed I will not, oh !
MARIAMNE [starts up and stands away from her]
It is so ! though she seemed a child ! ... my son ?
My Alexander ? left ! and in the care
Of such as *these* !
[to HEPSIBAH, who has fallen at her feet imploring-
ly] I loathe you,—loathe you all,
Shameful women ! I am mother and am wife ;
My heart is not that gaping avid thing
That sucks the unwed female, in distress ;
My bosom's richer than it has been milked
Five times, by several pairs of infant lips !
Base hearts ! my eldest boy ! my Alexander,
Whom I have hoped would one day grow to prove
God's great Messiah, Israel's longed-for King,
Great with his father's greatness, greater yet
With that great glory of the Maccabees ..

His nation's saviour! This ye knew, base hearts!

And yet I am alone among you, helpless!

HEPSIBAH I will be true; I have done nothing yet.

MIRIAM [also prone at Mariamne's feet]

And I am true; here is Salome's gold!

She said it was no bribe, but just a gift,

That I might speak her kindly; she was quick

And forced me take it. Pardon!

HEPSIBAH Pardon!

MARIAMNE [musingly repeats] Pardon, pardon!

[GEHAZI the chief of the eunuchs rushes in, falls at

MARIAMNE'S feet and catches hold of her robe.]

EUNUCH

O Queen, O mistress, help!

HEROD'S OFFICER [following]

Madam, the King

Commands that he be tortured and at once!

MARIAMNE

Go tell the King that I protect my slave!

HEROD'S OFFICER

The King forbade us heed aught thou shouldst say.

MARIAMNE

Take him; begone!

[The EUNUCH is carried off; the QUEEN turns to her WOMEN.]

—Give me my crown and robe of state at once.

ALEXANDRA [entering breathless]

This is the end! oh, this is thy success!

His cupbearer falls down at Herod's feet,

Declares that he for years has mixed his wine

With magic philtres which he had from thee:

But that to-day the drink was not the same

As was at other times provided him,

Therefore he feared, and rather brooked the blame

Of yielding to a young wife's pretty fears,

Than pour he knew not what in Herod's cup.

Thy husband howls and, like a man possessed,
Stamps up and down ; then bids them fetch thy slave,
And Sohemus he bade them bring him chained ;
And seeing, glared at me in such a sort,
That I made haste to get beyond his reach.

[MARIAMNE sweeps out, having assumed her crown and robe, followed by her women; but very shortly returns, halts a moment, then says]

Go see if there are guards
Outside upon those stairs !

HEPSIBAH [who has run to look]

Yes, two stand half-way up
And at the bottom more.

ALEXANDRA

Prisoned ! Thou art indicted of high treason
As Hyrcan was, if I foresee at all.

Behold where all thy humours have an end !
Me hast thou ruined ; I that warned thee truly ;
I, that, to-day, bade thee thy husband soothe !

Forget not *that* before thy judges. Once,
Whilst yet thou canst, right thou thy mother, girl !

MARIAMNE [taking off her crown]

What is the use of this ?

[She tosses it on one side.]

ALEXANDRA

Dost thou not heed me even yet, Cold Pride ?

MARIAMNE

When have I been a queen ?

The promises of birth

How they have mocked me !

This violence unjust

Has been my bondage !

This blind man's fury,

This jealous treachery,

This love that risks nought,

Without faith,

Without warmth,
Griping cold.
It tightens..
Suffocates..
Strength fails me!
My children..
Where are they?
[She sinks back as the CURTAIN falls.]

ACT III. SCENE II

Before curtains patterned with a roadside tree, half-way between the Alexandrium and Jerusalem, TUBAL and a young EUNUCH resting.

TUBAL I am too old for sudden moves like this.

EUNUCH Oh well, things must be as things are!

TUBAL

No donkey even left ! On foot! At my age! No mule!

EUNUCH

Eunuchs must trudge so long as they have breath.

TUBAL These violent young kings are a great curse.

EUNUCH

Silence wards off more woes than the tongue can.

TUBAL He'd been abroad so long, I had forgot
How he will post from North to South : wild
For just that little thing which is not his,
Though what he has defies arithmetic.

EUNUCH

Thou wears't a hat, he wears a crown ; la! la!

[Enter SALOME in a litter with the ARAB GIRL who cries, pointing at TUBAL]

That's the bought Eunuch.

SALOME [to the driver] Halt!

[to TUBAL] Old wretch, thy life
Is mine, who know thou hast been bought by women,
Who meet their lovers in the Palace gardens.

[TUBAL prostrates himself in speechless supplication.]

SALOME

Look at me... come old sinner, shape a smile
As though thou lovedst me! thou shalt love me
Better than food or sleep. Truth, on thy life!
Thy mistress was she chaste or had she lovers?

TUBAL

The Queen?

SALOME The Queen, dolt.

TUBAL Chaste, princess;

None ever was more chaste.

SALOME Bah! I would
She had been otherwise.

TUBAL May be she is;
How can those old as I am hope to know?
Heaviness overtakes us even by day
And then at night young lovers roam like mice.

SALOME

Dids't thou not speak the truth, when I said
"Truth, on thy life"?

TUBAL Nay, but I spoke the best
Of my belief.

SALOME But now thou wilt believe
What suits me better?

TUBAL Whate'er will please thee best,
August Princess.

SALOME Fool, it is truth I buy:
And dare you offer lies to please me better?
Sell lies to others, I will have pure truth,
Or else thy life.

TUBAL Thou shalt, thou shalt indeed!

SALOME

I like to manage other people's servants
By means of halters looped about their necks.
Sit no more idle, half the road's ahead!
Thou must serve doubly now, truthfully serve me
And falsely serve the queen; yet raise in her

No least suspicion! Up! Shake wits and bones!
On, on!—Whip me the mules, driver! on! [Exeunt.]
CURTAIN

ACT IV

A lofty circular hall. Around the one half seventy-one stalls for the Sanhedrin are built against the wall; the other half is vacant, and here have been brought chairs for CYPROS, SALOME, ALEXANDRA, around whom are gathered the different factions from the palace. A rope separates the two sections: at either end of this rise two thrones approached by many steps; HEROD'S on the extreme left in front; that of ANANEL, the High Priest, at the back in the centre. A clear passage is left from throne to throne along the rope, from which space up to the feet of the DOCTORS are arranged a quantity of low stools for their PUPILS. Two lanes, branching through these stools from the centre, run, one to a small door considerably to the right of ANANEL, the other straight to the front of the stage in the centre. By the first, DOCTORS and their PUPILS late to arrive are stealing to their places; by the second, MARIAMNE is being led in, with her back to the auditorium, when the curtain goes slowly up. A small railed dais has been prepared for her where both lanes converge; she is wholly draped in heavy black; the guard who leads her in seats himself on the steps of the dais. The two Officers of the Court are seated one at the foot of HEROD'S throne, one beneath that of ANANEL. They have their backs to those from the palace and face the SANHEDRIN, as does the prisoner. The PUPILS, of whom there is only a sprinkling, face the accused. Many of the stalls, which describe a deep curve from ANANEL to the extreme right, remain empty. HEROD'S CUPBEARER, the only witness, stands beside the OFFICER at the foot of the KING'S throne, who, rising, addresses the QUEEN:

Thou, Mariamne, Queen of Israel,
Art for high treason here arraigned; whereto

Is joined adultery, with Joseph first,
Thy husband's sister's spouse, and recently
With Sohemus. As thou art draped in black,
According to the custom of this court,
These venerable judges do demand
That thou assume an humble attitude,
And wait thy sentence with submissiveness
Matched to the shadow of that awful peril
Wherein thou standest under Moses' Law.

HEROD [who has his head covered by a napkin]
Is she now stationed where her fatal eyes
Cannot encounter with our own to kindle
That strange enfeebling fondness, which her drugs
Have nourished to such ravage in our frame?
The OFFICER [mounts the steps and draws a curtain looped over HEROD down till it entirely hides the QUEEN from him.]

My lord, the curtain shields thee from her gaze.

HEROD [removing the napkin, rises in his throne
and turns to the DOCTORS, most of whom are imagined seated where the auditorium is.]

Ye Priests, Scribes, Elders, Israel's foremost men,

Some haste appears in this your summoning,

And I perceive your number to fall short;

For judgment none the less those here suffice.

I am your King; design against my life

Is treason to the state. Know then, this Queen,

Implacable Mariamne, poisons us,

Holding our reason subject to her will

By philtres and unnatural sorceries,

Till now we find our very life at stake.

Such sullen blackness was from her regard

Discharged, her bribèd minister took fright.

The philtre he had deemed a woman's wile

And pardonable, being not the same

To-day, as that with which he heretofore

Had mixed our wine, he at our feet fell down..
Confessed the whole.. begged mercy and obtained it..
[bowing his head]

Our boundless fondness very grossly proves
The former potions' devilish effect,
So dire we dare not look on her again,
Yet have to summon utmost resolution
To hold our eyes from truancy foredoomed.

[raising his head]

Behold that beauty, whose abuse doth this!
Concoctions have not decomposed your blood
Nor brought its currents into servitude;
So ye may marvel at that dignity
Which makes her crime so great a sacrilege.

[turning and, finding himself obstructed by the curtain,
raising his voice]

On thee, our God's high priest, most wronged I call.
Open our court supreme with solemn prayer.

ANANEL Blessed art thou, O Lord of Sabaoth;
Mighty and tremendous art thou, God most high;
God of our fathers, God of Abraham,
The God of Israel, the God of Jacob,
The great God mighty and tremendous!

Because thou lovest righteousness, O Lord,
Dost thou rule over us with grace and mercy;
Else what were we to stand before thy wrath?
We therefore now beseech thee of thy might;
To slanderers let there be no hope at all!

May workers of iniquity be lost—
Upon a sudden in a moment let them perish!
O humble them at once and in our sight!
Thus shall thy judges fear thee and judge right.
O help them bring to nought all wrongdoers,
Making of no effect their confidence!
Upon the just, upon the pious, and upon
The elders of thy people and thy priests,

Bestow, Lord, we beseech thee, grace and wisdom!
[He sits down, the whole assembly murmuring
Amen.]

OFFICER [at the foot of HEROD'S throne, rising
and addressing the prisoner]

Thou, Mariamne, Queen of Israel,
Hast leave to speak now in thine own defence.

[A silence.]

If any here would say aught in defence
Of Mariamne, Queen of Israel,
He, first, before the accuser, shall be heard.

[A silence; then among the PUPILS a murmur of
Sameas, Sameas.

At length that DOCTOR, rising from his seat on the
extreme right, speaks]

O ye, that are assessors here with me
—O thou, that art our King,—neither myself,
Nor do I think that any other man,
Can now recall a precedent for this;
The accused, accuser, nature of the crime,
Amaze as did the deeds of God in Egypt.

Therefore I will not search the law for texts.

None will dispute that, if our Queen have done
All those things of which she stands accused,
Her life, though at the mercy of the King,
Is forfeit to the law. But this consider,

—And more, O King, than others, ponder thou,
How great and glorious is this woman's blood!

In what respect, till now, she hath been held!

Not only at the court, throughout the land

That reputation virtue only gains

She hath enjoyed; admit to scheme for this
Conceivable in one perversely willed;

Yet Jezebel and Cleopatra too

Schemed not for this, but shamelessly did wrong.

Then from experience reason in survey

Draws nought of confirmation in respect
Of her high state and honoured good repute.
Next, to her situation turn an eye
Or what regardeth passions probable
In such as form her circle and her train.
Not in kings' houses is it hard to find
False witnesses, when one can seek with gold;
Nor are those high in honour envied least;
Nor does a woman's hatred take a sword..
The tongue that sows dissensions she prefers.
Think how thyself stoodst in like peril once
Of Cleopatra's most offending tongue!
Can innocence, that scruples at a fib,
Foil the contriving lips that freely lie?
My lord, is any witness to these things
Save this thy youthful, unnerved cupbearer?

HEROD [rising again]

Nay, the chief eunuch, under torture, died
Ere he confessed, so clumsy were my slaves.
Yet he, at least, made plain that Sohemus
Had, in my absence, foully soiled my bed,
Indulging this Queen's hatred and his lust;
Which to my taking-off adds likelihood.

SAMEAS

When but one witness can be brought, my lord,
At least he should be tortured, ere believed;
Unless her Majesty admit the charge?

HEROD The dying eunuch's testimony confirms.

OFFICER [reads]

Gehazi, on the rack a third time stretched,
Made signal of his willingness to speak;
Relieved, he wept and said his mistress' wrath
Against her husband dated from that day
Whereon she, closeted with Sohemus,
Gained knowledge of commands to him delivered
Under close seal of secrecy. These were,

That should the King die, she should straight be slain.
But questioned of the philtres, he denied
All knowledge and refused to speak thenceforth,
Though racked a fourth and fifth time: when, being
slacked,

He unexpectedly gave up the ghost,
Despite our care and prompt solicitude.

Signed Draco; witnessed Hasdrubal and Mark.

SAMEAS Here is no confirmation; justly weighed
These words hint not adultery, my lord;
Neither imply they treason in thy Queen ...

And if in Sohemus, not of intent,
But that he, weak, betrayed thy confidence.

He was a man in years, of rigid life;
They might be closeted without reproach.

Though he did wrong, revealing thy commands,
This need not taint the honour of the Queen.

HEROD

And not, when Joseph failed the selfsame way?

Would both, for small gain, venture thus their heads?

SAMEAS Joseph declared he did reveal his trust
To prove how great thy passion for the Queen ..

Which she, to his confusion, took not so.

Were Sohemus now questioned, it may be
We should hear much to mollify our censure.

HEROD

Were Sohemus not headless, he might fable,
To woo the Queen, he had but praised the King ..
Brought home to her the warmth of my affection
As well as any man so far in years

Could hope to, held my honour worth his own.

Despatch upon conviction, that, that only
Prevents him smile upon and soothe his dupe!

SAMEAS Examination of this councillor

O King, had helped to justice either way:

So swift to execution is not wise!

HEROD Must I, to help your wisdoms see the light,
Endure that man's life who usurped my bed?
Why, every man's bed is as a king's throne;
Adulterers are stoned. Far worse his crime!

SAMEAS

But where doubt lurks, question alone sheds light...

HEROD [interrupting]

O count it not improbable, brave sirs,
That one so young, so delicate, so fair,
Preferred a grisled elder to myself.

Her hatred, darkening ever more, hath flowed,
Like that great Nile, who sometimes brings thick mud
Into the palaces of Egypt's kings,
From whence nought can debar his sullen force;
So hath her anger, like his swirling flood,
O'erborne the bootless courtesies of life;
So, through the trustful portals of my love,
The sickening moil of pale malignity,
In silence risen from that Nubian source
Her mind, came burdened, and unloadeth now
The heavy breeding slime of household guile
Round throne and life and state.

She, to debauch the man I left in trust,
Would lie with bones and kiss far skinnier hands.

SAMEAS [suddenly pointing with vehemence at the
CUPBEARER]

My lord, he should be tortured. See! He shakes!
Perchance some ill-intentioned Arab purse
Hath gilded those white lips.

HEROD Believe me, sirs, the lad is young and good.
Is not the Queen pale too?

SAMEAS My lord, as white as Death.

HEROD And is not hatred frozen in her face?
Thou art silent, man; speak truth. Is this not so?

SAMEAS My lord, the Queen is very beautiful,
And may be wronged, and surely is hard placed.

HEROD

Her beauty blinds thee yet: but hate protrudes
As through a soft life-nurturing woman's form
Age slowly thrusts the cheerless skeleton.

SAMEAS

My lord! my lord! yet for the sake of form,
This boy should be most straitly put to test!
The Queen is of the blood of Maccabæus,
Greatly beloved among the populace;
Therefore it were not wise to slight the Law.
She should be heard; this boy should be hard pressed.

HEROD

She should be heard! She cannot speak for spleen!
She hath been taken thus to-day already.

Her spirit contradicts her form so greatly
That both are at dead-lock: those lips of hers
Are far too fair to speak her very mind;
Her wholesome flesh doth turn against her soul.

—I, Doctors, vouch that what I say is true;
It is not just to-day's untasted cup,
Not what this boy may say or may not say,
Which proves her crime. Each added thwarted year
(Wherein, if I have ever found her kind

It has been gained by gifts and patient vows)
Her wedded husband has to woo her still,
Though married now six years; wherein I, perfect,
Kept me from other laps and lived as boys do,
Sick with their first love's coyness. Lost I heart?

No, all was suffered with the tenderest love!
Which boundless fondness very grossly proves
As I have said, what drugs did sap my blood.

SAMEAS O king, to-morrow is the Sabbath eve,
Whereon no sentence can be passed; nor can
A sentence on a charge which doth involve
Or life or death be passed the selfsame day
On which the trial cometh to its term.

This is the Law; therefore to set aside
Law's forms will not expediate the end.

HEROD 'Tis superstitious, this respect for forms,
When thou thyself hast pointed out the call
For rapid action, .. lest her danger rouse
In the duped people such mistaken warmth
As causeth conflagration unto states..
Tumults that impede the course of law ..
Seditions that, once getting head, put all
To the arbitrament of civil war!
Methinks that thou dost secretly incline
To unleash violence, in hopes to gain
By popular consent the reins of power,
Ambitious Pharisee! I will not risk
The whole achievement of my strenuous life
(For which I'm mapped with scars .. have hardships
borne,
Such as thy learned days can form no guess of),
To pleasure thee with one more precedent
For superstitious trifling with mere words.
Peace is at stake. As to this woman's guilt
Who entertains an honest doubt of that?
If any man .. her beauty trammels him!
To think such dignity a lie is hard;
For sound hearts teem with trust.. but hers did not,
But sent our children off to Maccheroos ...
They were too young to watch a poisoned man!
With slanders, accusations, tears and storms,
Her mother first and then herself went mad.
Her brother young Aristobulus drowned...
I drowned him! though I proved mine innocence..

A VOICE [from among the DOCTORS]

It was not proven here.

HEROD

Who spoke?

[a silence]

In Egypt

And before Antonius was I cleared...

Leave all such dust asleep! To day this witch
Refused me welcome.. put on mourning.. groaned
When I embraced her... scorning me outright.

I weep to think how yet she played with me
As with the mouse the cat doth .. gave me hopes,
Between her paws, and seemed to close her eyes,
Forgetful of her hate... when Fool! O Fool!

I, in the garden of my palace... I
Did pace beside her, wooing hate with love...
Five hours since it was! and yet she lives!

SAMEAS O King, I see thy pain : but cause and cure
Are they best found of patient or of leech?

Ah, in thy deep exasperation see,
Imperative, the call for time! Let bide:
After the Sabbath passed in holy thought,
Return to judgment calmly like a king!

I will be surety for the populace;
If they rebel, take thou my life, my lord!

HEROD *Thou* wilt be surety for the populace!

I said as much! Thou bold seditious man!

Perhaps my crown is really on thy head?
This is a witch-craft drug-deception ..nay,
This circular oppression which I feel

Is it not madness?

SAMEAS

Is there no other tongue which dares to plead?
Ye leave me unsupported : aid me, friends!

HEROD Help him, he totters ; the old man will fall!

SAMEAS Alas, it is thyself that stumblest, King.

PUPIL O King, I am a student, sitting here,
Both young and little learned : yet the law
Permits that we speak in defence of those
Who stand in danger of their lives .. and I
Make bold to tell thee that the Queen did blench,
Change colour, and look near upon to weep
When thou just now didst tell how short a time

Had passed since that thine heart had trusted hers.
May be thou hast been wronged unto her ear,
Even as she in thine, my lord, may be.

HEROD

Send for your nurslings and for those bed-rid ;
Such only can find words in such a cause...
The over silly and the overwise,
Let them "maybe" and query on : but men
Whose reason does not totter, sternly see
Need pressing that this demon's vot'ress die.

SAMEAS

Nay wait ! be careful how ye slight the law !—
This trial has not been in order, Sirs ;
Although ye suffer from this scourge of God,
[indignant murmurs among the courtiers]
Remember God more dreadful is than kings !
And thou, O King, to whom I prophesied
(What time thou, too, cited before this court,
Answeredst charge involving life or death)
This kingly power which thou abusest now ;
Thou, too, wouldst then have been condemned to death
Save that, in lieu of these prescribed black weeds,
Thou cam'st in golden armour, with a troop
And lances to intimidate the hearts
Of judges who feared thee yet more than God.
That time I prophesied their cowardice
[uneasiness among the Doctors]
Should cringe and suffer 'neath thine alien heel,
As now they do ; for not a judge sits here,
But smarts to see our law so trampled on.

HEROD [interrupting yet more furiously]
Confusion ! Where, without me, would ye be ?
Jerusalem were ruins ! Romans, Sirs,
Or else Arabians, here had pitched their camp,
And with your roof-trees cooked their evening meal,
And fortified themselves with threshold stones

And lintels out from which they marched their slaves.
Gabinius, Barzaphanes, Cassius, Cæsar,
Brave men from anywhere have but to come,
Then, when the robbers from the east should dodge
The Roman cohorts west, when Arabs poured
From out the south, and Parthians from the north,
Oh, ye might beat your breasts! Oh, ye might roll
Down in the dust, tearing your mantles then!

Jackals would soon whelp in your temple's courts,
And bandits dig your hidden treasures up
From rubble-smothered ruins left to guard
Of conies and the hoarse chough's callow brood.

[The DOCTORS and PUPILS alike express their horror, waving their long sleeved arms.]

SAMEAS [alone remains unmoved, upright as before, and now retorts]

The Almighty could raise up a Maccabæus,
A Samson, Gideon, David, Joshua—
Omnipotence depends on no one man ...

[breaks off coughing.]

MARIAMNE

Old man, be silent; for should any patience
But redress head within his heart, the lies
He has believed must straightway bludgeon it...
He deems his blood is drugged, then hold thy peace.

HEROD [greatly moved]

O speak again! For like rain-softened wind
Thy voice swept me who ached like parching sand!
[He leans forward, stretching out his hand to draw back the curtain.]

SALOME [springing up from her chair]

Touch not that curtain on thy life, good brother;
If through thine ear her medicine has such power,
Sight of her will enslave thee past recall.

[HEROD drops his hand and sinks back in his throne.]

PUPIL [rising as before]

Queen, speak again ; he begged thee speak again.

SALOME [imperiously] Silence, thou puppy.

PUPIL [as before]

Thy voice still reaches right home to his heart.

MARIAMNE

Those means most proper to defend the truth

Have liars wrested from us.

PUPIL

Then, O Queen,

Let Sameas speak, for all men look to him

As to a prophet.

SAMEAS [starting up] And now I prophesy

Repentance, following thine act too late,

Shall make thy fate more dire yet than his

The first Aristobulus of this throne;

Who, now some fourscore years past, slew his mother

And after her his brother; and of whom

Judas the Essenean prophesied,

And all came tr

HEROD [plunging again into fury, as though glad to escape from reflection, while they force SAMEAS to be seated, in consternation at the KING almost black in the face] Is not my mother seated there alive?

Have I my brother slain? Thou onager,

Thou hard-mouthed mule, shalt thou call prophecy

The impudence of thy schooled tongue-wagging?

Am I not held ensample to the world

For love of brothers and for *love* of kin?

Have I, remiss, behaved me tyrant-wise

To Phasaël or Pheroras or Jason,

That thou dost tax me with the infamous

Dead forebear of this wicked Jewish Queen,

Whom I accuse of so resembling him

As offspring will their ancestors? His blood,

The Asmonean, *she* inherits it! !

[to ANANEL, after a pause, in which he glares round the hall] Now let the judges signify her guilt!

[At a sign from ANANEL the DOCTORS hold out their hands in sign of assent, while the two OFFICERS record the votes in the two sections of the hemicycle. The vote is unanimous except for those near SAMEAS, who are occupied with the old Doctor, who is coughing and sobbing. The two OFFICERS hand their tablets to ANANEL, who, having glanced over them and written the sentence, returns them to the OFFICER whose place is on the steps of his throne, and who proclaims]

Mariamne, Queen of Israel,
Thou art by the Sanhedrin's vote declared
Convicted of high treason, whereunto
Is joined adultery with Joseph, first,
Thy husband's sister's spouse, and recently
With Sohemus : for reasons of high state
Thou art condemned to die this very day.

Three hours are thine to seek thy peace with God.

HEROD [as the sentence is read, has drawn back the curtain and gazes upon MARIAMNE, who turns no whit toward him but lowers her eyes : after a silence he speaks.] Now that she is condemned by the Sanhedrin,

There is no cause to fear the populace,
As all hath passed according to the law:
And to respect the Sabbath it were well.
The Queen might now to Alexandrium
Be instantly conveyed : our children there
Might take farewell and I ...

My masters, do I not speak as I should?

DOCTORS The thing is very pleasing to us all.

SALOME [loosing the cord, runs forward and mounts HEROD'S throne.]

Herod, thou art bewitched, the potion works !

Thou art like Samson : thy Delilah soon

Will have thee bound and grinding Jewish corn!
Thine eyes are fastened on thy doom, poor King!
Before the Alexandrium were reached
A thousand chances that she would be freed!
Be sure the rumour of her danger spreading,
Has brought together the fanatic mob,
Which will with fifty ambuscades, decoys,
Sudden attacks, and stones from hiding slung,
Soon disconcert the very steadiest guard
That thou canst summon at a moment's call.

[drawing back the curtain so as again to hide MARIAMNE from her brother, while he sinks back in his throne, she continues]

Herod, I save thee from thyself, unmanned
As thou hast been by years of drug-taking.

[The GUARD has begun to lead MARIAMNE forward towards the footlights, when ALEXANDRA, breaking away from her women, gets in front of her daughter. All the DOCTORS are leaving the court but are stopped by her voice.]

O shameless wanton, hast thou heard thy mother
Abused for a participant with thee
In all thy crimes, and art thou silent yet?
How often have I warned thee, headstrong girl,
What ruin thou wouldest bring upon us all,
Didst thou persist in injuring the King..
Debarring from his natural rights a husband
So fond, long-suffering and exemplary?
Confess it, even to-day, I urged his claims
With every argument my brain could forge!
Say, did I not?

[receiving no answer she strikes the QUEEN on the face.] Speak, stubborn strumpet, speak!

[The guard interposes, and MARIAMNE'S and her own women drag her away, while the whole assembly expresses its disapproval and consternation: but the

QUEEN seems not to regard it, save that at first she discovers some concern for her mother's offence: yet proceeds forward unshaken when the **GUARD** re-commences to lead, as the **CURTAIN** falls.]

ACT V

Three walls of naked rock, with a flat stone ceiling as in Egyptian buildings; to the left a doorway with two huge sliding doors; above this a grating, the one source of light; at the back right centre a narrow door closed upon a staircase of which the last few steps protrude into the prison; left centre a well, with a wooden barrel fixed above, on which the rope winds. The bucket is descending; some of the QUEEN'S WOMEN stand watching the two heavy crank handles whirl round. The water of a former draught stands in a shallow tub at the QUEEN'S feet, who is seated a little left of the well; towels strew the ground.

REBECCA [who has been peering down the shaft, looks up as the others begin to wind.]

How long it took before we heard the splash.

This well must needs be deep.

HEPSIBAH [who holds the QUEEN'S sandals, bending over] Impossible to see;
There is so little light.

[shuddering]

How horrible! How black!

MARIAMNE [clutching her black cloak round her, repeats] How horrible! How black!

REBECCA [looking into the bucket which has arrived while HEPSIBAH kneels at the Queen's feet]

Oh! it is clear! The bucket has become

Quite clean, at last.—Wilt thou not bathe thy brow?

There is no least speck clinging to the sides,

Or floating...it is clear and cold and clean!

MIRIAM

Dear Mistress, bathe thy brows and be refreshed.

MARIAMNE [to HEPSIBAH] Nay,

Why should I lace my feet in curious straps,

To step into the grave?

[To MIRIAM, who with the help of REBECCA

brings the bucket to the QUEEN]

Well, let me try...

[shrinking from contact with it]

It chills me even through my dresses .. flashing,

Icy and black with rusted stains. No, no!

It has been used for blood! I know it has;

Take it away! And though this fear be vain,

[recovering self-control]

It is too cold and would intensify

The aching of my brows.

MIRIAM Let me sprinkle a little in thy face...

There now! does that not do thee good? There, there..

I knew it would.

MARIAMNE Enough, enough! Have done!

I am relieved; my brows are not so hot:

Here, let me dip my hands!

[Carefully keeping her face turned from the bucket,
she immerses her hands and then damps her brows and
eyes.]

'Tis time we part; I must prepare my thoughts.

MIRIAM

Oh no, we cannot leave thee!

THE OTHERS [weeping] Never, never!

MARIAMNE

Indeed, ye should;

Your tears betray my frailty.

Be brave and quit me now,

All that you can is done.

I had doubts of your truth ... But that's forgiven,

And wholly past.

MIRIAM Nay, kindest, noblest,

Our gratitude's thy generous pardon's due.

MARIAMNE [standing up suddenly]

Oh, it is horrible

To fear those we must brush against and touch

In answering each day's claim; yet how much worse

Is dread of one whom pleasure, rest and sleep
Have long, and should long link and closet with us!
I was too set upon a perfect life.

MIRIAM [as the QUEEN sinks down again]
And whom should life content if not a queen?

MARIAMNE

“Queen’s” but a word; ’tis woman that I am:
And he was just a man.

Must no fault be to find in Herod’s love?
More flagrant had seemed human and scarce marred
A much less fortune for women husbanded
At lesser cost of God’s supreme endowments!

What, what? to make

Assurance, which mine honour armed him with,
Doubly assured, he gave commands?—paid spies?
He did this? Well, and if he did? They were
Precautions needless, not devoid of plea,
As sops to cosset nature’s frail misgiving.

—Hepsibah, weep not so: spare thy young heart!

—Farewell, Rebecca.—Naomi, farewell.

—Hepsibah, cease! thy life is but begun;
Thou shalt have others dearer to thy life
Than I have ever been.

HEPSIBAH

Does it then happen nothing waits the doing
Of those who would give all they are to help?

THE OTHERS Alas! Alas!

HEPSIBAH

Can the truth be, such willing love is vain?
Our eyes, our tongues, our youth, might these not work
Upon the king if tried?

MIRIAM How? in what way?

HEPSIBAH Can will devoted fail to find a way?

MIRIAM We are but slaves, all doors are barred to us.

HEPSIBAH

Let us try something! somewhere let us go!

And all as one wrest from his dark mistake
That light of reason which adored her virtue.
MARIAMNE [starting up and sweeping rapidly right, followed by MIRIAM] We utter words
Unconscious of all true contingency...
Speaking as those who speak
Surrounded by a dream...
MIRIAM

Why fling so wildly off? What dost thou mean?

MARIAMNE [excitedly]

Why, that our woe raves like a fevered king,
Whom nurses hear command in treasuries
Far from his bed, guarded by enemies,
Enfortressed in a town,
A thousand miles away!

MIRIAM

Whom dost thou think thus mad? Not one of us?

MARIAMNE [with sudden dejection and pacing slowly left, holding MIRIAM'S hand]

My heart, not now, but up till now, mistook
Its whereabouts, and dreamed of pride and power;
But now, a cold fit shows me

These bare, damp walls are what I deemed a palace.

MIRIAM But up till now thou hast lived in a palace?

MARIAMNE

And had a king for husband? even for slave?

MIRIAM

Of course, thou knowest it true.

MARIAMNE Nay, I perceive

The Herod loved was ne'er the Herod seen;

I was but tender with a fond illusion;

My kindness never met

The very call for aid,

Great Herod's bitter need.

Then how dared I to set

That crying out in slumber for his dream,

That straining after the impossible,
Against his true substantial kindnesses,
And would not humour him as he did me?

MIRIAM

The only wise course is to yield to husbands.

MARIAMNE [halting near the left wall and facing round] How often has he turned my wrath with words
Too kind for aught save the repentant kiss
Which lips, more true than my poor soul dared be,
Refused no longer; like a child that smiles
Despite the anger hugged unto its breast?

HEPSIBAH [who has left the WOMEN and joined the QUEEN, looking back]

Can no one tell him what the Queen has said?

MIRIAM Alas,

We are but silly women hear these things!

HEPSIBAH

While he, whose madness these kind words would cure,
Pines in a hostile silence fenced and caged.

MARIAMNE [pacing back to the well]

When he grew sick, who good, was good to me,
Had I no sweetness, no rich laxative

To soften his warped heart and stiffened will?

Was I found poorer than poor women even,

Who still have saved a cruse of oil..a box

Of precious ointment to anoint a bruise

Or do deep wounds some service, and repair

The damage of the man who fought for them,

Was jealous for their honour to excess?

Will they not bear with many slights from such,

Forego much liberty to humour them?

But I, a Queen, I, who have royal blood,

Returned him slight for slight,

Retrenched his freedom, when he curtailed mine,

Refused him welcome.. welcome

Of which love is the promise, as I think,

More truly than of any other good!

"Thou shalt be always welcome"; friendship even
Finds heart enough to say as much as that!

HEPSIBAH He must be told: report but half of this;
And ye shall see his love turn from Death's door
And come to her again.

MIRIAM We women slaves
Feeling! knowing! are heeded but as pigeons!

NAOMI Had we but strength, authority, or madness!

HEPSIBAH

We can but die against the door refused,
Or on the sword that is like us determined.

MARIAMNE

They will forbid ye: even your cries will never
Reach to his ear: but it is best ye go
Before my heart, my lips, my eyes, rebel
O'erpowering what of dignity remains.

HEPSIBAH We shall succeed;
I hear the long-lost key
Grind in the rusty wards
Of iron despair.

[running up the steps to the door]

Quick! let us haste away;
For soon we come back dancing,
To set her free!

MARIAMNE Yes, go:

[then holding back MIRIAM while THE OTHERS
join HEPSIBAH] O Miriam, think of my fond hopes!
My Alexander, be thou all to him
As to Messiah.. anxious.. prompt! Poor child,
It may be yet the Lord shall choose my son:
His father was not then what now he is,
And I was better far.

Remember, Miriam, all those glorious days:
The generous product of such hours might well
Bless all the world to come!.. It seems so, now

To me, it seems so, who have dwindle down
Till all my riches is the time long past.

HEPSIBAH [suddenly returning and wiping the
QUEEN'S eyes]

Dear mistress, waste no more of these bright drops;
Thy radiant joy will need them very soon.

MARIAMNE [kisses her with a sad smile, then waves
her hand to MARAH who has opened the door]

Marah, farewell.

[then to the others as they crowd up]

God bless each one of you.

When ye have failed as needs it must ye shall,
Come not back to me, let me die alone;
I have no heart again to say, farewell.

[The women, gathered on the steps which lead straight
up, say "Farewell." Then MIRIAM, kissing the
QUEEN once again, joins them, and closes the door
on the mass of their white garments.]

MARIAMNE [having listened to their footsteps
distancing]

Gone, gone! perhaps for ever!

—O proud Heart!

Art thou so terribly afraid to fail?

E'en in extremity wouldest rather still

Stoop than be seen to stoop? These walls are stone,
But thou art stonier than these walls, O pride.

What ailed me bid them to return no more?

Had I no comfort from their flowing eyes?

Were not their voices dearer far than silence?

I feared them? No, but trembled lest my soul

Should prove less fine than I would have them think it.

[slowly pacing she continues with bitter emphasis]

All this long study to ensure control,

That makes us slaves unto our dignity..

To the mere phantom of our would-be worth,

How this improves warm love and cheerful life!

Have I been wary of my mother's fault,
Rash rage that gathers unto madness fast,
Have I despised my husband's jealousy,
Have I contemned *these* for their garrulous tongues
And women's over-talking, all for *this*,
To find the issues of my nature choked?

[Re-enter HEPSIBAH running down the steps, she gasps breathlessly]

They would not let us through, but timely groans
Told us he listened while thy words went in.
Our accents were aglow still from thy heart!
So he has heard...

MIRIAM [who has followed, interrupting from the door] He is on the third floor;
Come with us now. Perhaps, hearing thy voice,
And feeling thy heart is mother to thy thoughts,
He will run forth, arms wide agape for thee.

HEPSIBAH

Come!

MARIAMNE [irresolute]

How can I?

MIRIAM Think of thy children, come!

MARIAMNE

They will not let me pass.

HEPSIBAH Who can forbid
A mother when her child cries out for help?

MARIAMNE [yielding]

If I could only in my heart forgive!

But this I cannot do;

Let others do it,

Let them when little learn:

But I will die.

[She sits down on the steps and bows her face into her hands.]

HEPSIBAH Is this the mother of an Alexander
Well grown, nigh six years old?

MIRIAM

Would the young master were but here! Thy teeth
Would wound that tongue ere it resolved aloud
On so bereaving him.

MARIAMNE [looking up conscience-stricken]

My Alexander, O my Christ, am I
More cruel to thee than thy father is,
Leaving thee child of a beheaded Queen,
Who could make no defence, whose stubborn lips
Were steadfast in suppression of the truth,
Let lies have way and gave wild passion rein
Because she did not choose to stoop her pride?

[starting] Dreadful it is when we give way to brooding!

HEPSIBAH

Even as though Death lulled us with his eye
So that we dream or ponder, when life bids act.

MARIAMNE [mounting the steps]

Death's dupe holds gloomy converse with her soul.
[opening the door and facing round to her women]
But I am of the day! I live! I breathe!

Am mother to an Alexander!..hope
For the great world with warm maternal pangs!..

Am young!..am full of courage!..am thy foe,
Thou gloomy magisterial realmless Death!

There is a thing to do, which must be done...

[She snatches one sandal from MIRIAM, who has
picked them up, and stoops to lace it on.]

HEPSIBAH [while MIRIAM kneels to help]

She comes and he will hear;
Heart will answer heart;
Truth like an echoed laugh
Speed to and fro,
And cold and stony walls
Go wild with joy.

MARIAMNE [presenting her second foot to be
sandalled by MIRIAM]

My Alexander, hark! Thy mother lives!
Hath she been rendered useless by slight checks
Of things run counter to her darling's hopes?

[stooping to knot the other sandal]

Why, Herod, veritably is no more

This mad and easily incensed tyrant

[rising]

Than acting thus he is my husband!—Herod,
Come back! return! come back!

[turning to go up the stairs and as suddenly returning to stand in the doorway] Alas!

He no more dares to look me in the face.

He doth believe! He hath believed! No hope!

Yes, there is one;

And this it is:

For pardon I

Must take unto my credit
My sins, and sin again.

More sins than are mine own.
[HEPSIBAH and MIRIAM laugh as a good idea.]

[HEPSIBAFTA
MARIAMNE

MARRIAGE
Women have often done as much when girls

Defending shiftless lovers.

I must confess the philtres.

MIRIAM

Yes! Yes! confess the philtres!

HEPSIBAH Cut his mind free;

It is like Samson tangled fast in withies!

MARIAMNE [hesitating again]

But the draught? and Sohemus? and Joseph?

That woman's ruined

Whose falsehoods, even,

Have no more chance than mine to be believed!

Are these the wits he praised?

Invent! Invent!

MIRIAM

O for a cunning lie!

MARIAMNE

No lie will serve, for there! he dreads mine eyes
Then, most of all when love leaps out from them:
If he regard me but as leprosy,
Esteem what he most loves in me as worst,
I shall be forced to act vile as his thought,
Worm to his favour as he holds I left it...
Sohemus, doubtless, was entangled thus,
And Joseph, poor old gossip. Bah, I dream;
The only proper course has been pursued.

[The QUEEN attempts to descend again into the prison.]

HEPSIBAH [opposing her with a lyrical assumption of authority] No, no!

Nothing has yet been done
As God would have it!

Now shall the true heart reign!..

From this hour, yea, from this second!

NAOMI [also moving with HEPSIBAH upwards]
This heavy time must labour with a bliss

Ripe to be born; our sufferings grow so pregnant.

MIRIAM [urging upward with them] Come, come!
Till the last stone be turned

Why call your penny lost?

HEPSIBAH [as before]

That proverb's worth much gold,

Nothing is done, till everything's been tried.

[They all move up the stairs, the Queen hopelessly yet unresistingly carried with them. A silence of several seconds. Then, the sound of voices in altercation slowly approaches from afar. At last the QUEEN reappears descending followed by SOLDIERS, who stay at the doorway and intercept the WOMEN, who one by one attempt to follow her down into the prison.]

HEPSIBAH [trying to force her way past them]

Let but my nails tear out

Those counterfeit eyes,
That blind you may see!

SALOME [who enters above, and forces her way down among the women]
Obstruct me at your peril!

[The SOLDIERS raise their spears, MIRIAM and HEPSIBAH run down and join the QUEEN.]

SALOME [to the SOLDIERS as she passes them]

My brother must have rest. They dared invade
The upper corridors, the prisoner with them:
Mark, no one must approach him after this.

[pointing to the women still held up by the soldiers]
Take those and shut them in the southern wing.

[as she turns to descend into the prison]

What is the hour?

SOLDIER The first night watch will soon be set.

SALOME

'Tis time all part from the Queen. Fetch those two back.

[Other SOLDIERS descend from above and seize MIRIAM and HEPSIBAH.]

HEPSIBAH [to the soldier who holds her]

I see you like an ant,
A black dot moving;
Myself I see,
White pack it carries.

MARIAMNE [to the SOLDIER who has lifted HEPSIBAH to remove her]

Be gentle with the child.

SOLDIER Fear me not, Queen.

[MIRIAM and HEPSIBAH are led up the steps.]

SALOME Now, is my hate as open as you like it?

MARIAMNE Insensible to every other passion
Save grief, I see you, what you are, unmoved.

SALOME [laughs, follows the last to leave, and closes the door.]

MARIAMNE [as she comes forward] O Death,
Let me think well of thee! We rise again;
Hyrcan was doubtless wrong, the Pharisees
And those of Alexandria in the right.
If all were vanity, as he maintained,
Despair would not be cruel: and it is.
[peering down the well]

Icy and black and deep and mute and still...
Attracting so the downward inclination
Of our prone minds. To lie forever still?
Rest? Horror wed to Peace doth sleep below.
The water, that waits mute, would shout a welcome
And echoes upward noise how I was hailed!
Hoarse laughter "Vanity of vanities,"
Hollow resoundings swelling out to naught!
My soul has not made a success of life
Yet is not brought so low to filch from Death
His few last minutes' cruel tardiness.

[kneeling]
A broken and a contrite spirit, Thou
Wilt not reject. O Lord,
I cannot now undo
The wrongs that I have done;
Accept my penitence,
Accept my son.

[Breaking, the doors on the left commence to open;
she gets up, gathers together her black robes, leaving
her head alone uncloaked, and faces the twilight which
two SLAVES with their utmost effort barely avail
to slowly widen; then pointing]

Is that the place where I must kneel?

[VOICE from without It is.

She walks firmly out through the two doors which the
SLAVES at once commence to drag together again.
A silence.

Then the narrow door is violently opened and CASTOBAR enters carrying keys. He shouts to the two SLAVES, who have remained within the prison]

Here is the seal!—delay the execution!

[The SLAVES commence once more to push the doors; when they are some foot apart, he covers his face with his hands, bowing his head. A pause. Then CASTOBAR, hearing HEROD'S approach, signs to the SLAVES to shut the doors, and rushing forward helps them.]

HEROD [entering breathless] Mariamne!

[He throws himself against the closing doors. The others stand back, while he sinks gradually to the ground, sobbing. After a pause, he looks up and speaks with difficulty] My grief is nothing:

This enervating passion will decrease,

My blood will clear.

[rising, he continues with an effort to control himself]

I have sufficient strength to walk, to live,

To think, if not to hope. Still, still my mind

Knows virtue, and can nobleness admire;

I am a man still, standing in the light,

Distinguishing the worthless from the worthy,

And not confused in judgment...

O my wife!

[with a wail, he totters and falls; CASTOBAR hurries to him as the CURTAIN comes down.]

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